

# 9 “Hello My Lovelies!”

## Conflicted Feminisms and the Neoliberalisation of Portuguese Activist Influencer Practices

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### Introduction

Social media platforms, such as Instagram, have revitalised contemporary feminist politics, bringing new opportunities for civic and political engagement, and enabling wide public visibility for feminism (Mahoney, 2020). In Portugal, after years of slow uptake of popular feminism, there seems to be a new wave of social media savvy feminist and social justice minded people quickly gaining a steady footing on online platforms, amongst them the feminist psychologist and sexologist Tânia Graça.

Portugal is a generally conservative society. Until recently, online feminist movements and hashtag campaigns that generated important societal conversations internationally, such as #MeToo, have had little public expression nationally (Garraio et al., 2020). This lack of permeation of feminism in wider societal discourses can, in part, be understood in light of the history of feminism in Portugal. The long fascist dictatorship of the Estado Novo in Portugal and its conservative Catholic foundations cemented extremely narrow views of the role of women in society, and feminist activists in Portugal only regained significant expression after the fall of the dictatorship on 25 April 1974 (Tavares, 2008). After the revolution Portugal saw a surge in activism that continued into the 2000s, striving for issues such as legal abortion, sexual liberation, and protection against domestic violence, and expanding to incorporate intersectional concerns and LGBTQ+ rights. While Portugal secured the rights to abortion or same-sex marriage in the late 2000s and early 2010s (Marôpo et al., 2017, p. 281), cultural change did not necessarily accompany these legal frames – feminist issues are still received with significant resistance and scepticism (Simões & Silveirinha, 2019, p. 2).

This conservative mindset is particularly noticeable on issues related to sex and female sexuality. While sex has become a popular topic within certain media genres, such as women’s magazines and popular morning television shows, societal discussions about sexual freedom or harassment still attract significant backlash. Discussions about sex are often guided by

existing sex panic scripts (Irvine, 2006), generating emotional responses of disgust or anger that reflect and reinforce existing societal, cultural, and political values and a conservative sexual morality.

Yet, in recent years online and social media feminism has slowly become more visible in Portuguese society. As Marôpo et al. (2017) noted, there are a significant number of pages promoting women's rights and gender equality on Facebook in Portugal, although these generally have low metrics of engagement. International online movements, such as #MeToo, that originally failed to rise to the level of a consequential national debate (Garraio et al., 2020) were, in 2021, experiencing a national resurgence. This is due to the emergence of accusations of gendered sexual harassment (Ropio et al., 2021), which garnered wider public attention.

With over 149,000 followers (at the time of writing), the Instagram account @taniagraca – owned by Tânia Graça, a Portuguese psychologist, sexologist, and self-identified feminist – seems to reflect this growing popularity of feminist discourses on Portuguese social media. As her Instagram bio states, this account is dedicated to promoting sexual empowerment that leads to women's empowerment. While the account dates back to March 2013, for the first years her content was mostly personal, showing typical Instagram photographs with her friends and family, with occasional feminist posts punctuating her profile. A post from April 2019, titled “SOMOS TODAS MACHISTAS” (roughly translated as we [women] are all male chauvinists), marks a turning point towards the more deliberately educative and feminist content that now comprises most of her posts. The popularity of Tânia's feminist sex education on Instagram has since led to invitations to participate in popular podcasts and mainstream TV Portuguese shows, like *O Programa da Cristina* or the late-night comedy show *5 para a Meia-Noite*. Tânia's social media practices thus became a broader national media ecosystem and celebrity culture, in an expression of popular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

We can situate Tânia's Instagram practices in the context of fourth-wave feminism (e.g. Chamberlain, 2017; Munro, 2013), mirroring its use of social media and digital tools for feminist communication, mobilisation, and community building. Social media platforms, like Instagram, can increase the general accessibility of engagement with feminism to wide and diverse audiences that might not wittingly look for political content. Much like fourth-wave feminism is understood in continuity with prior feminist practices (Pruchniewska, 2016, p. 738), Tânia's Instagram feminism is reminiscent of earlier sex-positive third-wave feminist debates (e.g. Glick, 2000; Snyder-Hall, 2010), mirroring its discourses of sexual education, exploration, and liberation. Yet, the general third-wave emphasis on individual choice, rather than on the systemic causes of inequality that underlie sexual choices, complicates the possibilities for collective social movement (Snyder-Hall, 2010, p. 260) – a tension that is also noticeable in Tânia's online practices.

## Methodology

This chapter aims to explore the complexities and tensions of contemporary feminist practices on social media, using the account of @taniagraca as a case study. This case study is grounded on a direct unstructured observation (Given, 2008, pp. 907–908) of @taniagraca’s account – including her profile bio, shared images, IGTV videos, live videos, and accompanying captions and comments. In addition, we also analysed her Stories Highlights (i.e. Instagram Stories that are fixed on a user’s profile, lasting more than the default 24 hours), as well as ephemeral Instagram Stories shared during the period of analysis. The account was observed from October until December 2020, but the analysis extended diachronically, reaching the account’s first post dating from March 2013. As the account continues to exponentially grow and release new content, following the principles of digital ethnography to avoid data and information overload (Kozinets, 2010, pp. 104–105), we decided to end the period of in-depth observation on 7 December 2020, the date on which the account celebrated 60,000 followers. After this, we maintained a perfunctory observation of the account to catch any significant developments. The analysis started from an attentive scrolling through @taniagraca’s posts, in order to get an overview of the dominant kinds of topics of concern, discourses, representations, and engagement strategies. This was accompanied by the extensive taking of field notes. This approach was also attentive to Tânia Graça’s mainstream media appearances, allowing us to make sense of the broader reception of the account (we attempted to invite Tânia Graça for an interview to get further insights, but she declined due to lack of availability).

## @taniagraca and Popular Feminism Online

A significant portion of Tânia Graça’s Instagram content openly engages with feminist politics. With humorous titles and captions such as “FEMINISMO, O BICHO PAPÃO” [Feminism, the Bogeyman], Tânia’s posts seek to demystify feminism for a wider audience and counter established negative prejudices, such as the conflation of feminism with extremism or with female ‘hysteria’. Tânia’s posts address a range of feminist issues: abusive relationships and gender-based violence; online and offline sexual harassment; female solidarity (or lack thereof), amongst others. The vast majority of her content, however, is dedicated to reframing feminist ideals around issues of sexuality and relationships, presenting sex education and the exploration of personal sexual pleasure as a “tool for female liberation” (taniagraca, n.d.). While many of these posts fall into an advice and tips and tricks format, others contextualise issues of sexual education, such as the use of condoms, in light of the dominant gender norms. By using long-form video formats or accompanying her photographs with long captions, Tânia is able to share complex information, develop her conversational and friendly

tone, and incorporate personal experiences into her feminist content. This use expands on the visual-centric technological affordances of Instagram, as long captions help to direct the audience readings and understandings of the images, aligning them with her feminist message (Mahoney, 2020, p. 12).

Through the use of feminist hashtags – such as #feminismo, #igualdadadedegénero, #empoderamentofeminino (i.e. #feminism, #genderequality, #feminineempowerment), or hashtags appealing to transnational audiences, like #womenempowerment – Tânia’s account is also situated as belonging within a wider feminist conversation (Papacharissi, 2015). Tânia’s content and hashtag choices also enable more visibility and discoverability within the platform. Tânia has become one of the first and very few Portuguese influencers dedicated to openly discussing these types of issues. However, as her account and audience grew, this particular use of hashtags declined, becoming limited to posts seeking to engage with specific movements, such as the Portuguese #movimentonaoenormal (i.e. #itsnotnormalmovement), or to the use of hashtags like #pub to signal commercial partnerships. Likewise, by tagging other Portuguese feminist and activist accounts in her posts and Stories, Tânia builds small networks of popular feminists that engage with and amplify each other. These aspects also point to how global social media discourses on sex and feminism might have influenced Tânia’s Instagram content creation. As Tânia’s account grew, her choice of hashtags displayed an adaptation to a local Portuguese audience, as well as to a national network of activist influencers. In this way, global feminist discourses pervade local content producers who follow Instagram’s trends closely, reflecting how global and local social media cultures are closely connected and mutually influencing each other, yet allowing space for unique local dynamics.

Despite their feminist framing, Tânia’s posts can at times risk falling into heteronormative discourses that reinforce gender binaries. Although disclaimers suggest that she employs generalisations to enhance simplicity, Tânia’s relationship advice can occasionally reproduce essentialist understandings of gender, such as the idea that women are “naturally more unsatisfied” within their (presumably heterosexual) relationships and men are more pragmatic, making references not only to socialisation but also to different cerebral and hormonal constitutions between genders to ground these assumptions (taniigraca, n.d.). The heteronormative tone was also noted by some followers, who commented on the lack of references and suggestions to non-heterosexual bonds in her posts about sex and relationships. This inferred, often in a seemingly deliberately friendly tone, that Tânia could also share advice for non-heterosexual couples, presenting this as ‘just another excuse for getting great videos’, as one commenter put it. Tânia responded to these comments by reiterating her support for the LGBTQ+ community, yet emphasising her focus on heterosexual relationships and cisgender women as a professional choice, thus almost overtly reflecting a self-branding decision. In her view, limiting the

scope of her content allows her to create more ‘high quality’ content. As an indirect response to these criticisms, Tânia made a series of Stories directing followers to other Instagrammers working on the topic of sexuality and relationships from a more inclusive and LGBTQ+ friendly perspective. In this way, while these generalisations can help her simplify issues and engage with a wider audience, we should be critical of a lack of attempts to deconstruct generalisations or to represent alternatives to normative models of relationships.

### Instagram Self-representation and Embodied Feminism

A noticeable aspect of Tânia’s content on Instagram is its consistent emphasis on the notion of female (and feminist) embodiment. Tânia’s openness to discuss issues of female sexuality aims to break the conservative taboo in Portugal that frames sex as a topic that should only be discussed (if at all) in private, within the confines of intimate relationships. Focusing on female sexual pleasure, her content also seeks to displace the religious, social, and cultural conventions that continue to promote a narrow notion of female respectability.

In this vein, this account has several posts on the topic of female masturbation. In a mix of scientific language, sex tips, and friend-talk, these posts offer suggestions for more satisfactory masturbatory experiences: ranging from the psychological ‘rid yourself from feelings of guilt’ self-acceptance mantras, or the use of certain sex toys. More than a fun activity, these posts present masturbation as a tool for empowerment. Echoing earlier sex-positive discourses, these posts hint at the political potential of sexual exploration, yet most videos frame its advantages in individual terms of personal liberation, better personal relationships, more self-confidence, and self-love.

This emphasis on the female body as a site of empowerment risks uncritically reproducing normative conventions of sexiness. One of Tânia’s videos promotes the use of lingerie as a way to “feel sexier, hotter, more powerful” (taniigraca, n.d.), echoing popular postfeminist advice that presents lingerie as a tool for increasing sexual self-confidence and gendered consumerism as a route for empowered female sexuality (Barker et al., 2018, p. 13). These recommendations can reproduce the same *heterosexy* aesthetics prevalent in traditional media and in the dominant visual economy of the male gaze (Dobson, 2011). In addition, despite her calls for self-acceptance, in the same video Tânia reassures her viewers that no cellulite will be on display even while wearing lingerie, thus failing to interrogate the dominant standards of what is deemed attractive and sexy. These paradoxical discourses complicate the distinctions between sexualisation, objectification, and expressions of liberation and pleasure (Barker et al., 2018, p. 55).

The second way in which Tânia’s account emphasises the role of feminist embodiment is through her consistent use of self-representation: that is, of

images and videos in which she is physically visible. Scrolling through her profile, we can observe that nearly every single post contains self-representations, either in posts that combine a picture of Tânia with a feminist caption, or in vlog-style videos. This emphasis on self-representation seems to merge feminist practices with the dominant platform vernaculars of Instagram (Keller, 2019). As Instagram's cultural imaginary is dominated by the visual, the photographic, and an association with self-representation, this can lead to feminist practices that centre corporeal expressions of activism and the representation of an embodied feminist identity (Savolainen et al., 2020). Tânia herself seems to recognise the strategic role of self-representation, as she playfully states in one of her posts that she decided to accompany a post about feminism with a “cutesy photograph” of herself “just to see if more people would read this” (taniigraca, n.d.). Using self-representations can thus become a strategy to attract attention, to sustain readership, and also to present feminist ideas in a more ‘approachable’ way.

Unlike her home videos, Tânia's photographs are most often framed in highly aestheticised ways, often taken by professional photographers, and in some cases even counting on the help of stylists or make-up artists – all duly tagged either in the photographs or in the captions. These images often show Tânia (who is a conventionally attractive, young, white woman) smiling at the camera, but they also include artistic semi-nude photographs. Like much of her content, these semi-nude photographs are also framed in terms of personal empowerment. Through this use of self-representation, feminist discourse becomes centred around Tânia and her personality, as she arises as an embodied example of the values she tries to communicate to her audience.

However, this focus on embodiment can also increase the visibility of feminist bodies and subject them to more monitoring, surveillance, and discipline, as well as being used by others in an attempt to control her discourse or compromise her feminist agenda. This risk can be illustrated by some of the comments made on Tânia's account. Many of these, even when made by other women, focus on her appearance, complementing how beautiful she looks in a supportive girl-power tone, often disregarding the written content of the post and the subject being discussed. Several men display the same focus, posting (relatively rare) objectifying comments and turning compliments about her appearance into semi-humorous romantic banter, exemplified by comments asking her on dates to ‘get to know her better’ or inviting her to dinner, or even, as the following section shows, into sexual propositions that verged on sexual harassment.

### **Instagram Platform Politics: Limiting Sexual Self-expression**

While Instagram's platform vernaculars encourage embodied expressions of feminism, its platform politics and Terms of Use can, on the other hand, shape its configurations and limit its scope. Platforms like Instagram are

not mere hosts created by individual users; rather they carry specific platform politics (Gillespie, 2010). These politics are made explicit through Instagram’s Community Guidelines (2021) and Terms of Use (2020), which state what content can be shared and what is liable to be removed. Instagram thus restricts most representations of nudity and sexual activity, and also limits sexually explicit language and the use of vaguely defined “sexually suggestive elements”. These restrictions have a clear gendered character, as evidenced by the decision to restrict “uncovered female nipples”, while male nipples can be unproblematically shared (Facebook, 2021).

These policies promote a deplatformisation of sex on social media, through a combination of platform rules and content moderation (Tiidenberg & Van der Nagel, 2020), and while the Facebook Community Standards (2021) offer an exception to sexual imagery shared in educational contexts or to raise awareness of a cause, the narrowness of these restrictions risks erroneously limiting the work of sex educators like Tânia Graça. While we encountered no evidence that her content was ever deleted or shadow-banned (see Tiidenberg & Van der Nagel, 2020, p. 53) from Instagram due to its sexually explicit content, this is something that is on Tânia’s mind, as she offhandedly comments in one of her videos: “I can’t share pictures of vulvas here or else they might censor my video” (taniagraca, n.d.). Although without interviewing Tânia we cannot ascertain her reasons for choosing a platform that limits the expressions of sexual freedom that are central to her feminist position, these limitations bring to the foreground tensions between, on the one hand, restrictive platform politics and, on the other, the widespread audience-reach that popular platforms like Instagram enable.

Opposition to sex talk can come not only from the platform, but also from users themselves. Tânia’s audience is overwhelmingly supportive, and her work is often celebrated as valuable information and a ‘public service’. However, some of Tânia’s content hints at the existence of negative, and even harassing, comments and private messages. For example, her video on unsolicited dick pics emerged as a reaction to having personally received such content in her Instagram Direct Messages, and we could also observe some overtly negative comments in her posts. Online hate is pervasive on social media platforms (Jane, 2014), and anti-feminist comments are frequent in other Portuguese online environments (e.g. Simões & Silveirinha, 2019). Tânia’s fleeting references therefore point to the possibility that there might be more backlash and harassment than is publicly visible on her account – either being sent via private message, or being managed through practices and tools of comment moderation (e.g. Lunden, 2021).

### **Feminised Empowerment-speak**

Alongside their focus on sex education or feminist topics, Tânia’s posts, and particularly her videos, are easily recognisable for their personal, intimate, yet playful tone. In the manner prevalent amongst influencers, Tânia

addresses her followers as if talking to an audience of friends: starting each video with “Hello my lovelies” and frequently using terms of endearment, talking candidly about sex, and using common Portuguese slang to exemplify the relationship dynamics she addresses in her content. This way of communicating helps to bridge her educational content with entertainment, thus appealing to a wider audience, and to distance sex and feminism from its societal taboos (Sundén & Paasonen, 2020).

There is also a gendered tone underlying Tânia’s communication, as her affect-driven style and focus on engaging with her followers’ questions about sex and relationships parallel prior women’s genres, particularly advice columns in women’s magazines (Phillips, 2008). This is especially noticeable in her weekly feature “Consultório do Amor” [Love Clinic], live sessions in which she answers questions submitted by followers. Even though we have no insights into the demographics of @taniagraca’s followers, her content seems to presuppose a predominantly female audience, often addressing directly her female followers and espousing scenarios that teach women to navigate heterosexual relations.

At the same time, Tânia’s intimate and humorous tone also functions as a form of self-branding (Marwick, 2013). The intro of all her videos, welcoming her lovely followers while excitedly clapping at the camera, became almost a catch-phrase, recognised and praised in the comments. The consistency of this intro was a deliberate choice, as Tânia herself notes on her second IGTV video: “You guys liked the clapping so much that I kept it.” (taniagraca, n.d.).

Both Tânia’s content and her tone align with the notion of *spectacular feminism* that tends to dominate the contemporary popular media landscape (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020). Tânia’s content and representational strategies seem to point to an effort to distance herself from the dreaded stereotype of the *feminist killjoy* (Ahmed, 2010). Her content is rarely confrontational or overtly seeking to address systemic inequalities or propose collective action. Instead, aligned with the conventions and vernaculars of Instagram that tend to privilege positive content even within feminist action (Savolainen et al., 2020), Tânia’s account is often defined as ‘cute’ psychology and feminism by her followers, thus echoing the mandates of popular ‘happy’ feminism, which focuses on uplifting women (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020, p. 9).

While these emotions and intimate discourses are often used as a way to dismiss the legitimacy of feminist complaints (Ahmed, 2014, p. 170), in Tânia’s account this affective tone seems to be linked to its popularity. This can also be understood as related to the feminised relational labour that is expected from social media (Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2017). Tânia’s tone and social media practices come together to create a sense of *perceived interconnectedness* with her followers (Abidin, 2015). This is cultivated through labour-intensive practices: Tânia often likes followers’ comments or briefly replies to many of them with smiley faces and heart-shaped emojis, she asks followers for suggestions for future posts, or she answers their questions



through Stories and Instagram Live sessions. This sense of perceived interconnectedness creates an environment where followers feel comfortable sharing personal experiences related to the posts’ topics via direct messages and public comments – from joyful (and at times embarrassing) stories of masturbation, experiences of sexual harassment, to emotional testimonies of past relationships trauma and abuse.

Yet, a more critical analysis can also perceive this relational work as a way to generate social media engagement and to ‘feed the algorithm’ (Abidin, 2015). As Abidin (2015) notes, for influencers the desire to foster a sense of closeness with followers can also be motivated by commercial interests. An audience emotionally invested in their relationship with an influencer can be more receptive and dedicated. The performance of interconnectedness online necessarily includes the use of affordances such as likes or comments. In this way, invitations to engage with the posts, even if not motivated by cynical considerations, are always contributing to popularity (Pruchniewska & Duffy, 2016, p. 3).

### **Influencer Culture, Commercial Logics, and Activist Influencer Practices**

Despite its focus on women’s empowerment, we can understand Tânia Graça’s social media practices as linked to influencer cultures. Broadly defined, influencers are content creators who accumulate (and maintain) a relatively large following on their social media platforms (Abidin & Cover, 2019, p. 217). Influencer practices are thus shaped by the dominant social media logic of popularity, with platform metrics, such as numbers of followers or likes, becoming quantifiable markers of success (Marwick, 2013, pp. 187–188).

Tânia employs several strategies to incentivise the audience’s engagement with her content. Her posts and videos call on followers to “give that cute like” (taniigraca, n.d.), comment, save the post, and share with other friends who might also enjoy her content. These requests mirror common scripts of engagement seeking both on Instagram and on other platforms, such as YouTube. But these forms of Instagram engagement are also framed by Tânia as a source of encouragement and love, and an incentive to continue to create more content, thus combining commercial and emotional benefits (Abidin, 2015).

Much like traditional influencers, Tânia’s account also includes commercial partnerships and sponsored content. She playfully acknowledged this commerciality in one of her posts from January 2020, in which she announced “the first publicity moment of this Instagram”, remarking in a tongue-in-cheek aside “oh my god, I’m feeling like such an influencer” (taniigraca, n.d.). Since then, Tânia has established several commercial partnerships, promoting products from sex shops, contraceptive brands, intimate hygiene products, and reusable menstrual products. Her commercial partnerships

are closely aligned with her sex education and female empowerment content, mirroring the notion of commodity activism, where feminist ideals become a selling point for particular products (Banet-Weiser, 2012, p. 19).

Alongside her educational content, Tânia also publicised a life-coaching and female empowerment workshop which she facilitated, aimed at promoting self-knowledge, self-esteem, and healthy sexuality and relationships. Both this workshop and her content at large echo an extremely individualistic vision of *neoliberal feminism* (Rottenberg, 2014) – one that is able to work within the dominant capitalistic system, privileging individual self-improvement and entrepreneurial ‘solutions’ to promote gender equality, while ignoring the structural socio-cultural and economic sources of gender inequality. Within this context, popular and media-friendly expressions of feminism that align more easily with neoliberal commercial interests can achieve more widespread visibility (Banet-Weiser, 2018). In a social media context, we can also see that feminist expressions that fit better with Instagram’s dominant culture of positivity and self-representation are likely to attract more engagement on Instagram (Savolainen et al., 2020). In this way, the individualistic, confidence-based, feel-good notions of female empowerment that dominate Tânia’s content can be critically read as more easily saleable and shareable.

Thus while Tânia’s account frequently acknowledges that there are broader issues of socialisation and education that contribute to the social and sexual oppression of women in Portugal, her suggestions of how to engage with these issues are quickly reframed in individualised terms: it’s about getting what *you* deserve, be it respect, love, or orgasms. Aligning with the dominant confidence culture (Gill & Orgad, 2015) that encourages women to love themselves while still placing the brunt of the emotional labour of self-optimisation within the realm of personal responsibility, Tânia’s upbeat empowerment speech emphasises positive thinking and the importance of having the right mindset. Addressing more ‘serious’ feminism issues, such as rape or gendered violence, can lead to noticeable tonal shifts, often aesthetically marked by a shift to black and white portraits with more serious facial expressions, by the use of graphic white text compositions over solid black backgrounds, or by addressing these topics in the ephemeral format of the Stories, either through text, more informal videos sharing her opinions, or re-sharing other people’s posts on the topic.

Tânia’s rise in online popularity was accompanied by increased invitations to appear in several popular media outlets: from podcasts and multiple TV shows, to interviews for large national newspapers. Online popularity became a springboard for her visibility in mainstream media industries with a significant viewership in Portugal. This led to a new influx of followers and a solidification of her role as influencer, in a mutually reinforcing feedback loop that illustrates how the quantified logic of social media is complemented and enhanced by traditional logics of mass media celebrity (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013, p. 7). This media attention can also be seen as

generating visibility to certain political or social issues (Tufekci, 2013), in this case towards ideas of female sexual empowerment. Yet, the selective welcoming of ideas and actors who fit better with the pre-established mass media conventions can lead to the reification of white, heteronormative, and middle-class hegemonic ideals, addressing only the concerns of those who fit the same profile (Banet-Weiser et al., 2020, p. 17). Tânia with her joyful and individualised feminism seems to fit rather well within the current popular media landscape in Portugal.

Given this, we understand Tânia’s social media account as an illustration of *activist influencer* practices. While Tânia employs many of the strategies associated with traditional influencers, her account started to gain popularity with a message that sought to be explicitly oriented towards women’s empowerment, rather than those societal concerns emerging as a trendy afterthought. With the rise of recent highly networked activist efforts, such as 2020’s global Black Lives Matter protests, the notion of activist influencers has been widely discussed in popular online media, and there is a growing need for academic research to accompany these discussions (see Abidin & Cover, 2019; Glatt & Banet-Weiser, 2021; or Tufekci, 2013 for examples).

The case study of Tânia Graça’s Instagram offers insights into a use of social media and its affordances that is politically motivated, commercially savvy, aligned with national popular culture appeal, and replicating, perhaps inadvertently, pernicious neoliberal feminist discourses. As an example of *networked microcelebrity activism* (Tufekci, 2013), it shows the emergence of extremely visible actors that are not quite institutionalised political actors, nor celebrities or ‘ordinary’ social media users.

Similarly to celebrity feminists (Hobson, 2017), feminist Instagrammers like Tânia have the potential to widen the visibility and acceptability of social and feminist issues, potentially opening the space for a dialogue with more ‘conventional’ forms of feminism. At the same time, these creators often seek to financially benefit from popular neoliberal feminism, thus potentially reinforcing a narrow genre of commercially safe and easily likeable and shareable social media feminism (e.g. Glatt & Banet-Weiser, 2021; Savolainen et al., 2020). We can see the solidification of this genre in countless websites and online guides that share tips and tricks for the successful activist influencer (e.g. Martinez, 2020; Reid & Sehl, 2020; Riley, 2021), touting advice that frequently mimics generic influencer tips – such as be genuine yet consistent, don’t be performative and hop on trends, and interact with your followers. Yet, some guides also offer advice that points towards the possibility of more collective action grounded in traditional activism – such as providing verifiable information and resources, tagging other activists, or partnering with existing organisations.

Despite its potentialities, activist influencer practices must be critically engaged with, recognising the criticisms that such practices risk commercialising and watering down feminist politics, reducing it to likeable posts. We must strive to question how activist influencer practices on

Instagram can become actionable, or conversely when they can become self-serving popularity acts.

## Conclusion

The case study of Tânia Graça's Instagram account allowed us to explore how online feminism is aligning with a trend towards popular feminism expressions, contextualising these dynamics in the context of a still largely conservative Portuguese society. Using her Instagram account to engage with a range of feminist issues, Tânia has managed to create engaging feminist content that quickly rose to popularity, both online and offline, largely due to its playful and accessible tone.

As this chapter explored, Tânia's feminist content fits particularly well into Instagrammable conventions and aesthetics, centring the embodiment of feminist politics, not only through its focus on issues of bodily experiences and pleasurable sexual experimentation, but also due to its emphatic use of self-representation. Yet, Instagram's platform politics (Gillespie, 2010) can limit such embodied expressions of feminism, as they carry a gendered bias against representations of female bodies that are linked to efforts of deplatforming sex (Tiidenberg & Van der Nagel, 2020). Awareness of this potential deplatforming can thus lead to a necessity to monitor and, at times, restrict the types of feminist content shared. In addition, by centring self-representation, Tânia's content seems to attract comments concerning her physical appearance, both positive compliments but also comments that verge on harassment and objectification.

Tânia's content also relies on a conversational, personal, and intimate tone. This creates a sense of community and perceived interconnectedness (Abidin, 2015) with her followers that can be seen in both feminist terms of community building and consciousness raising, as well as, more cynically, social media strategies to increase engagement. The accessible tone of her content also allows for an expansion of political conversations to otherwise reticent audiences. At the same time, this tone also draws on gendered conventions reminiscent of women's magazine advice columns (Phillips, 2008), further linking Tânia's social media content to notions of popular and spectacular feminism (Banet-Weiser, 2018) that tend to privilege 'cute' expressions of feminism, centred on individual issues, while avoiding potentially more controversial topics of structural gender inequality.

We explored Tânia Graça's social media presence and recognised examples of activist influencer practices. We saw that traditional influencer strategies can be employed in the service of an essentially feminist aim, while still allowing for a commercialisation and popularisation of feminist discourses.

Given the growing popularity of activist influencer practices in Portugal, not only with Tânia Graça, but with other popular Instagrammers such as Clara Não or Diogo Faro, we must critically question the political potential of this popular feminist digital turn. As this paper indicates, we can see

some clear assets to an accessible and ‘soft’ approach to feminist issues, such as the one exemplified by Tânia Graça. Activist influencer practices can be effectively employed to strategically attract attention to social justice issues, increasing the visibility of feminist ideals and opening up spaces for dialogues that were, for a long time, absent from Portuguese society at large. There is hope that these popular Instagram accounts can be, for many people, a starting point for further feminist mobilisation towards social change.

At the same time, we should not fall into overly utopian readings of such popular expressions of feminism. Low-effort modes of political participation, such as being informed via entertaining social media accounts, can lead to a sense of feminist engagement and of having already enacted political action. For some, online engagement with feminist accounts risks becoming the full extent of their political action. We should question how these engagements might be complemented with more collective and time-consuming (and often less entertaining) political efforts, such as engaging in offline protests, joining organisations, signing petitions, raising funds, etc.

There are inevitable tensions between feminist ideals that seek to address intersectional and systemic gender inequalities, and feminist practices that are constrained by logics of popularity, visibility, and commercial success. While, in the context of social media, attention and visibility are essential to enable the political visibility of feminism, strategies to increase the reach of feminist discourses can become subsumed to the dominant conventions of Instagram and popular culture, potentially limiting the type of feminist content that can attract widespread popularity to easily acceptable actors (most often white, young, thin, and pretty) and expressions of feminism (such as individualised feminist expressions centred on self-improvement and commercial consumption).

However, it is crucial to recognise that online popular feminisms are not static and can shift in reaction to emergent societal events. In the specific case of Tânia Graça, changes in the Portuguese social and political reality – with the rising representation of far-right parties – have created space to disrupt (albeit temporarily) her usually ‘cute’ and commercially friendly feminist tone. Since the time of our observations, Tânia has created videos in response to the 2021 presidential elections, protesting against the far-right candidate and incentivising her followers to vote. This more overtly politicised position received some backlash, leading her to openly recognise in her Stories the misogyny, violence, and online hate she received. As the feminist landscape in Portugal continues to change, with an increase in public debates on sexual harassment triggered by a resurgence of the #MeToo movement in Portugal (Ropio et al., 2021), it is worth remaining attentive to see whether this cultural moment prompts activist influencers towards more collective organising – such as through collaborations like the one Tânia Graça established with the politician Cristina Rodrigues to enact legislative changes on issues such as rape and the criminalisation of non-consensual re-sharing of intimate content – or whether these concerns

can themselves be absorbed into a neoliberal feminist individualist mindset that continues to centre self-improvement as the main route to liberation.

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