Mismatched Encounters: The Appropriation of Humour and Satire in Civic and Political Activism on Facebook

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This article investigates the role of humor and satire as mobilization and political communication strategies in anti-austerity movements in Portugal, analyzing interactions between activists and followers on Facebook. Based on interviews and digital content analysis, it reveals that followers create and disseminate more humorous content, while activists adopt a cautious approach, constrained by material limitations and perceptions of public responsibility. Humor reinforces alternative narratives and community ties but may exclude actors from the public sphere.

Keywords: Social movements, Facebook, humour, civic participation, anti austerity

Encontros desencontrados: A apropriação do humor e sátira no ativismo cívico e político no Facebook Este artigo investiga o papel do humor e da sátira como estratégias de mobilização e comunicação política em movimentos antiausteridade em Portugal, analisando interações entre ativistas e seguidores no Facebook. A partir de entrevistas e análise de conteúdos digitais, revela-se que os seguidores criam e disseminam mais conteúdos humorísticos, enquanto os ativistas adotam uma abordagem cautelosa, limitada por constrangimentos materiais e perceções de responsabilidade pública. O humor reforça narrativas alternativas e laços comunitários, mas pode excluir atores da esfera pública.

Palavras-chave: movimentos sociais, *Facebook*, humor, participação cívica, antiausteridade

1. Introduction

he request for a bailout from the Troika in 2011 represented a crucial moment in Portugal's recent history, marking the beginning of a period of intense political and social mobilisation. In this context, anti-austerity movements and their followers on Facebook appropriated humour and satire as tools for social and political contestation. This article investigates the meaning that activists and followers attribute to the use of these resources, exploring the differences and similarities in their perspectives.

The Great Recession that began in the USA in 2008 had repercussions throughout the world, being felt in the following years, particularly in Southern Europe (BAUMGARTEN, 2013). This crisis, which started out as strictly financial, had profound implications for the quality of life of the most vulnerable social categories. One of the greatest impacts was on young people, leading to an outbreak of protest, known as the "Torn Generation". In a country with a chronic deficit of mobilisation and even of voluntary work (BARRETO, 2004); spontaneity in the Portuguese public sphere (PRIOR; SOUSA, 2014) is not a characteristic, usually following institutional procedures (AMARAL, 2020).

In four decades of Portuguese democracy, civic and political mobilisation was scarce (KOUSIS, 2014; ACCORNERO; PINTO, 2015; ACCORNERO, 2015). However, echoing what was happening in other latitudes, such as USA with the Occupy (CHOMSKY, 2013) or the Indignados in Spain (BAUMGARTEN; DÍEZ, 2017; DELLA PORTA *et al.*, 2018; DÍEZ GARCIA 2017; FISHMAN, 2011, 2019; PORTOS; CARVALHO, 2022) witnessed a surge of social contestation and demonstrations, despite the obvious cultural differences (HERMETO, 2021). All these movements had as a common denominator the contestation of the austerity policy because of the financial crisis.

In parallel, we are witnessing the intensification and dissemination of internet¹ access and consequently the multiplication of digital social networks. Portugal follows, from this point of view, more generalizable trends where Facebook reaches 76.7% of the Portuguese followed by YouTube (23.7%) (CARDOSO; PAISANA; PINTO-MARTINHO, 2017). In short, the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century was characterized by a strong increase in access to the Internet and digital social networks, which became privileged means of access to information. This trend has been intensifying, particularly regarding access to and consumption of online information content (e.g., Facebook and WhatsApp) (CARDOSO *et al.*, 2021). Considering the advantages and disadvantages, the impact of the use of these platforms on the public sphere is clear: on the positive side, contributing to the politicisation and increase of interest in political and civic activity, as is the case of Twitter (SOUSA; PINTO-MARTINHO, 2022) but also, to its political polarisation (KLEIN, 2020).

Under the pretext of challenging a symbolic measure that became known for the TSU² issue, large demonstrations were organized in different cities³. Among the movements that stood out in the leadership of social contestation are Que se Lixe a Troika, O Povo é Quem mais Ordena, Indignados Lisboa. The criteria that influenced the selection of the eight movements will be developed in the methodology section.

In this way, we propose to understand how humour and satire have been integrated as elements of civic mobilisation strategies and political contestation in the public sphere including the digital one. With this objective, we intend to contribute to the debate on the role of social movements, more specifically, to understand how these collective actors have appropriated humour and satire for civic mobilisation.

2. Theoretical Framework

Despite the increase of artificial intelligence and its multiple implications in the political sphere, we cannot omit the relevance of sociocultural factors in the appropriation of these technologies (BENKLER; FARIS; ROBERTS, 2018; WOOLLEY; HOWARD, 2018). From this point of view, it is central to conceive the public sphere as a complex and articulated communicational and informational scheme (CALHOUN, 2005; PENTEADO; FORTUNATO, 2015; SARMENTO, 2020).

Kuhn (2007) argues that laughter, especially in the public space, such as satires, mockeries and parodies, functioned as a critical mechanism that challenged established power structures, allowing the population to express discontent and challenge authority figures, such as the local mayor Jakob Herbrot. This phenomenon demonstrates how humour could operate as a space for communication and resistance, outside the official and controlled spheres. Indeed, laughter was not just entertainment, but a fundamental element in urban politics and power dynamics. By studying this particular case, the author demonstrates how apparently marginal cultural practices could shape the public sphere and influence political debate.

This integration and sharing of interests and goals results in the consolidation of a deliberative public space (PEREIRA, 2012). The public sphere is thus a social structure that having at its base communicational and informational impulses privileges the visibility of the deliberative debate. Anti-austerity movements are distinguished from their precedents (TEJERINA *et al.*, 2013; NUNES, 2019), since they constitute themselves as spaces of participation and mobilisation making use of digital platforms, to mobilise actors chronically distanced from the political sphere (PETTI, 2020) as was the case of the feminist movement in Spain and in Chile (ESCHLE, 2018; SILVA, 2020).

For Margetts (2013) tension is a central feature in the relationship between democracy and internet. The articulation of these two domains has raised great debate, a polarized debate between technological pessimists, and the so-called digital dystopian (SIMÕES, 2005; CORREIA, 2014). It follows from this debate the premise that technologies and in particular digital social networks are neither neutral, nor independent of interest groups (FUCHS; SANDOVAL, 2014). It is in this line of reasoning that (SOUSA, 2023) argue that it is intrinsic to these movements to criticise the mainstream media culture and legitimise the status-quo and austerity policies.

The digital space can assume a dual function in strengthening democracy, according to Dutton (2013) by promoting greater popular control of the political process and for greater political equality. However, Brasil, Santiago and Brandão (2020) and Mendonça (2023) have shown that consulting and reading news is still a highly selective practice that reproduces inequalities. In effect, the Internet indicates streamlining the integration of citizens in the political and civic sphere, which go beyond the traditional formal and institutional mechanisms.

In the current media ecosystem, digital social networks have the potential to promote alternative forms of participation (DAHLGREN, 2014). They allow the initiation of new communication and interaction circuits (RECUERO; ZAGO, 2016), sharing the structuring role of the relationships of a social network anchored to co-presence (BOYD; ELLISON, 2007).

The articulation of these two domains summons us to an approach of a pluralistic nature, which consists of communication from many to many, operationalising web 2.0. It is in this digital ecosystem that emerges what Bruns (2008) refers to as producer, which refers to the dual condition that the same actor can be simultaneously consumer and producer of content. In the same vein, Coleman (2017) understands the internet as a space for self-expression emphasizing

the spontaneous nature of the practices that occur there, including those of political and civic nature. In a digital public sphere, social movements (TATAGIBA; PATERNIANI; TRINDADE, 2012), may be preponderant in the design of public policies, constituting themselves as privileged political actors. For Castells (2013) networked social movements stand out by being based on a multimodal communication model of digital social networks, but also by their spontaneity both in their origin and actions and finally have a strong deliberative component in their structuring.

For Meikle (2009), civic participation on the web involves: the construction of inter-creative texts, which consist of the re-editing of original texts, images and memes, emphasising the imagery component; interpretative tactics that are embodied by discourses and practices of electronic civil disobedience; inter-creative strategies based on informal practices of contestation and expression of political positioning; creative networks that involve the appropriation of online forums and software. The communicational model described embodies a strong interactive and creative tendency, given that the resolution of problems involves inter-creativity, where various actors collaborate and deliberate. Activists do not arise spontaneously; they are producers, but also products of social, political, and technological conditions.

Kandler and Carvajal (2021) concluded that in the digital context it is more common to use irony than humour, especially in political circumstances, serving to reinforce the political positioning of users. It is in this context that memes have gained prominence in the digital sphere and on Facebook in particular, as Hauber and Maia (2022) show humour is a constitutive component of the meme itself. Despite their usefulness, the decoding of the message sometimes proves problematic for a part of the population (LESMANA, 2021), as was the case of Salman Rushdie (RAJAGOPALAN, 1996), or in the context of contestation to the Troika in Portugal (SOUSA; MORAIS, 2021; CAMPOS, 2014). Even in seemingly more sensitive areas such as parenting, these types of tools have been designed to question hegemonic forms of pregnancy, using humour and sarcasm (CONTRERAS; GRAJEDA, 2021). In essence, memes (CHAGAS, 2020), murals or simple posters and flyers contain a strong contestatory and somewhat transgressive slant towards a dominant normative standard that one wants to question.

Humour, as a multifaceted social, cultural and political phenomenon, is defined by its functional ambiguity (KUHN, 2007; TAYLOR, 1995): it unites communities by forging emotional and identity ties; however, it also serves to segregate by reinforcing cultural and ideological boundaries. In the realm of social movements, humour possesses the potential to foster solidarity, cultivating a sense of belonging among activists and their followers (DAHLGREN, 2014). Nevertheless, this very capacity to mobilize can alienate external audiences—particularly those who lack the cultural or contextual references necessary to grasp the humorous messages (RAJAGOPALAN, 1996). This dual nature of humour renders it a powerful yet precarious tool; its interpretations fluctuate based on individual experiences and sensitivities. On one hand, it can fortify communities through the sharing of memes, satires and ironies that reinforce

contestatory narratives (MILNER, 2013; HAUBER; MAIA, 2022); on the other hand, it may exacerbate polarizations, excluding or antagonizing groups that do not resonate with the particular humorous discourse in question (LESMANA, 2021). Indeed, according to Basu (2007), humor should be understood as a powerful mechanism for social contestation. This operates simultaneously as a vehicle for political critique, a means of collective mobilization and a form of symbolic resistance. However, one might question the effectiveness of such an approach. Although humor can be impactful, some audiences because of its nuanced nature may also misinterpret it. This complexity adds layers to its role in societal discourse; it can provoke thought, but it can also trivialize serious issues if not wielded carefully.

Thus, humour serves not only to reflect pre-existing social dynamics; however, it also amplifies them. It functions simultaneously as both a bridge and a barrier in political (and cultural) interactions. Although this dual role is complex, it is essential to understand its implications, because these interactions can shape perceptions significantly. Therefore, the digital ecosystem may become a space of growing relevance in a context of social contestation and of political institutions, namely by enabling the pluralisation of opinions and discourses that are traditionally absent from the public sphere. We may postulate that we are facing not only new opportunities for participation, but also reconfigured expressions of that participation, such as humour and satire with a civic and political content. Thus, we formulate the following hypotheses:

- H1 The appropriation and use of resources such as humour, satire or cartoons is positively associated with greater civic and political mobilisation, namely among the activists of the social movements studied, compared to their respective followers;
- H2 The transversal trait that characterises the discourses of activists on the use of humour and satire is spontaneity and what is perceived as the "taste" of the followers.

3. Methodology

3.1 Selection of the Movements Under Study

The research adopted a mixed methodological approach, combining content analysis of the Facebook pages of eight of the main anti-austerity movements with semi-structured interviews with six activists from these movements. The Facebook pages were analysed for their use of humour and satire, while the interviews explored the activists' motivations and perceptions regarding the use of these resources. The civic movements that led the protest were very diverse and all of them have a presence on Facebook. The selection of the eight movements to be studied had several criteria, from the highest media visibility: Que se Lixe a Troika and Indignados Lisboa (FIGUEIRAS; ESPÍRITO SANTO, 2016; FIGUEIRAS; ESPÍRITO SANTO; CUNHA, 2014), but also for holding very particular causes such as Democracia e Dívida and RiseUp Portugal, as well as for the high number of followers: O Povo é Quem mais Ordena, Artigo 21° e 15 Outubro and finally for the strong imagetic character of their action as is the case of FLAN Colectivo.

Table 1: Facebook of the Movements Studied

Movement	Founding year	Number of likes	Number of followers	Link
15 Outubro	12/07/2011	6.082	6.047	facebook.com/15deOutubro/
Indignados Lisboa	20//07/2011	17.414	17.390	facebook.com/IndignadosLisboa/
RiseUp Portugal	09/06/2012	156.643	157.599	facebook.com/RiseupPortugal/
FLAN Colectivo	18/06/2012	2.960	2.972	facebook.com/flanparatodos/
Que se Lixe a Troika	27/08/2012	28.140	27.557	facebook.com/Que-se-Lixe-a- Troika-Queremos-as-nossas- Vidas-177929608998626/
O Povo é Quem Mais Ordena	10/10/2012	20.879	20.361	facebook.com/o.povo.ordena/
Democracia e Dívida	03/04/2013	1.116	1.123	facebook.com/people/Democracia-e- Dívida/100064353832866/
Artigo 21 ^{o4}	_	_	_	_

Source: Elaboration and own calculations based on data collected from Facebook, updated on 04/06/2022.

All the movements studied have their "digital origin" in a period, between July 2011 and April 2013, particularly marked by the intensification of social conflict, because of the intervention of the Troika and the then Government. Below, we present the justification for each of the indicators. We will take as reference the period of one week, that is, from 5 to 11 June 2013.

3.2 Facebook Content Analysis: Persuasion, Humour, and Aesthetics

The model consists of the dimension: Persuasion, Humour and Aesthetics. This operationalised in five indicators, which will allow the effective measurement of the phenomenon. Each of the

indicators will have a measurement measure that goes from 0 (not at all adequate to 6 (totally adequate). It will be considered the score of each of the Facebook pages of the eight movements studied.

Table 2: Summary of the Content Analysis Grid

Dimension	Indicators	Score	
Persuasion, Humour and Aesthetics	Profile picture, cover and slogan use		
	Use of photos/videos and other elements in the posts by followers and administration	Not at all adequate (0) Not at all adequate (1)	
	Use of cartoons and caricatures in the content posted by the administration	Not at all adequate (2) Adequate (3)	
	Use of cartoons and caricatures in the followers' posts	Well Suitable (4) Very Adequate (5)	
	Use of irony and satire in the framing in the content posted by the administration and the followers of the group	Fully Adequate (6)	

Source: Prepared by the author based on the theoretical review.

The construction of the indicators and their respective ordering was based on the criterion of the level of complexity of implementation. As a result of this premise, the five indicators were hierarchized internally, by assigning different levels of weighting to each of the indicators. Thus, with this ordering of the indicators we were able to represent different levels of complexity both in terms of the appropriation of the platform (Facebook) and of competences that condition conventional civic and political initiative in the public sphere. In practical terms, each indicator will be multiplied by a value corresponding to the weighting. In this way, we achieve a hierarchy between the five indicators by assigning differentiated weights to them, because they involve processes that mobilise different skills and knowledge. The model may be summarised as follows:

1 — Profile image, cover, and use of slogans;

In the initial indicator, we intend to measure the political appeal of the profile picture, the appeal of the cover picture, finally, the use of slogans and slogans in the cover and profile pictures.

- 2 Use of photos/videos and other elements in the followers' and movement's posts; We intend to evaluate the existence of photographs in the posts, the use of videos, the existence of other resources and creative communication and interaction strategies.
- 3 Use of cartoons and caricatures in the contents posted by activists; It focuses on the following aspects: in the profile posts, the Notepad section and the replies to the posts and comments from the followers.
- 4 Use of cartoons and caricatures in the followers' posts and comments;

 Regarding the contents produced by the followers, the following will be considered: in the profile posts, in the Notepad posts and in the comments to the activists' posts.

5 — Use of irony and satire in the framing of the contents shared by activists and followers; The posts by activists, the posts by followers and the comments both by activists and by followers are established as reference.

Given that the mediation of the various indicators is the responsibility of the responsible researcher, the use of Krippendorff's alpha is not necessary since this guarantees the reliability of the codification of the measurements.

3.3 Indicators and Selection of Interviewees

The semi-structured⁵ interview script sought to address a wide range of themes, including the place of humour and satire within the movements studied and the role that the activists interviewed attribute to them. In this way we sought to question the interviewees about: how do you perceive the role of humour in the action of the movement? How often do they resort to it? And for what purpose? Do they use other means that go beyond Facebook? For example, posters, murals, and graffiti. How do you manage to mobilise funding for this? Which strategy do you think is the most effective and has the greatest capacity for mobilisation within the movement?

Briefly, we would say that we seek to understand how activists in their civic and political action conceive humour, but also to understand under what circumstances it appears in their various activities. To understand how it appears in the various forms of activism such as demonstrations, but also in the digital context, specifically on Facebook, allowing us to contrast contexts of co-presence with strictly digital interaction frameworks. Table 3 presents the social and demographic characteristics of the interviewees.

Table 3: Social and Demographic Characterisation of the Interviewees^{6,7}

Movement	Sex	Age	Education	Professional occupation	Carrying out the interview	Duration
Que se Lixe a Troika	Female	29	University education	Journalist	14h30 20 August 2013 (Anjos)	54.21min
Indignados Lisboa	Female	48	University education	Unemployed	17h30 20 August 2013 (Caís do Sodré)	53.52min
Democracia e Dívida	Male	66	University education	Retired	14h15 2 August 2013 (Gulbenkian)	50.05min
O Povo é Quem Mais Ordena	Female	31	High school	Unemployed	14H30 30 July 2013 (Campo de Ourique)	28.34min

Movement	Sex	Age	Education	Professional occupation	Carrying out the interview	Duration
RiseUp Portugal 1	Male	38	High school	Unemployed	16h 29 July 2013 (Rossio)	1h53.22min
RiseUp Portugal 2	Male	_	University education	Manager	16h 29 July 2013 (Rossio)	1h53.22min
15 Outubro	Male	34	University education	Unemployed	13h10 6 September 2013 (FCSH-Nova)	51.04min

Source: Elaboration and own calculations based on the interviews carried out.

Among the seven interviewees, four are male. The average age is approximately 41 years old. From the professional point of view there are very heterogeneous conditions, as we have unemployed people, managers, journalists, and retired people. There were five attempts to schedule an interview for each movement. The last of which was made on 27 August. The approach was to send a message to the movements' message box. In general, it was answered by an activist who would later be interviewed. In the interview or post-interview register, it was said by the same people who were responsible for communication and contact with elements of other movements or with traditional media.

All six interviews were conducted in the city of Lisbon. This illustrates the centrality of the Portuguese capital, in terms of the existence of a kind of "contestation market". The scheduling and carrying out of the interviews were also conditioned by the fact that it took place in the middle of summer — silly season.

The six interviews were always carried out in public spaces: esplanades, museums or institutions linked to education and culture. In all of them it was possible to ensure a minimum of description and intimacy, fundamental conditions for both interviewee and interviewer not to feel or be embarrassed. The interviewees suggested the locations.

Systematically the interviewed activists presented themselves at the agreed place and time. The strategy was essentially to establish an informal and relaxed dialogue, to transmit some trust between interviewee and interviewer. As far as the RiseUp Portugal movement is concerned, it was carried out by interviewing two of the activists that compose it. Hence its longer duration is justified. The average duration of the six interviews is 58.40 minutes, for a total of 350.38 minutes. With full transcription. All interviews were conducted on condition of anonymity, although some of the activists explicitly mentioned their lack of concern regarding the content of their statements and their possible identification. We should even mention the fact that in these situations the activists declared that they were speaking mainly in their own name, following the informal norms in

force within some of these movements. This is a methodological strategy centred on a qualitative approach, as has been done in other studies on the same subject.

4. Data Presentation

4.1. Content Analysis

In general, the data point to great asymmetries in the effective use of humour and other imagetic components that Facebook potentialities. Considering the architecture of the model in which the maximum score would be 30 points, which would be equivalent to a full appropriation of the various tools, we find that no movement achieves this. 15 Outubro was the movement that published the most in the period under study (cf. Table 4).

Table 4: Number of Posts Analysed Between 5 and 11 June 20138

Movement	Number of posts analysed		
15 Outubro	22		
Indignados Lisboa	17		
RiseUp Portugal	16		
FLAN Colectivo	8		
Que se Lixe a Troika	5		
O Povo é Quem Mais Ordena	6		
Democracia e Dívida	14		
Artigo 21º	_		

Source: Elaboration and own calculations from data collected on Facebook.

The social movement with the best performance in the five indicators is the one furthest from the centre (see Figure 1), in this case, O Povo É Quem Mais Ordena. This movement is the one that in absolute and relative terms obtains the highest score, with 22 and 66 points, respectively. In average terms, it obtained 4.4 points among the five indicators. The Indignados Lisboa movement obtained the second-best score among the five indicators with 20 points, the same as RiseUp Portugal. However, both movements have different scores, when weighted respectively at 64 and 54, which reveals that Indignados Portugal makes a more complex and sophisticated use of humour, satire and other imagery resources compared to RiseUp Portugal.

In a group with average scores are Democracia e Dívida, Artigo 21° and Que se Lixe a Troika with 12 points in absolute terms. Also, here we see that there are still relevant differences, namely with Artigo 21° with a much more diversified and complex appropriation of the various resources,

with 38 points, in contrast to the 24 points of Que se Lixe a Troika. This allows us to see that the Artigo 21° movement makes a more complex use of the resources than Que se Lixe a Troika.

The group with the lowest scores is made up of 15 Outubro and FLAN-Coletivo, with 8 points in total and an average of 1.6 points across the five indicators. Between these two, 15 Outubro shows a higher concentration of scores in the first indicators, those with the lowest weighting. FLAN - Colectivo, on the other hand, although it has the same score, is dispersed among the various indicators, which may be interpreted as a slightly more diverse appropriation of humour and other resources on the part of the latter movement.

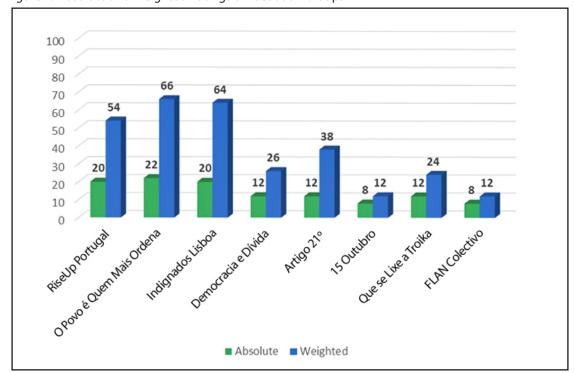


Figure 1: Absolute and Weighted Ratings of Facebook Groups

Source: Elaboration and own calculations from data collected on Facebook.

There are three movements: 15 Outubro Que se Lixe a Troika and FLAN Colectivo that do not allow access to posts and shares by followers on their page. This option greatly conditions the scores obtained by these movements in three indicators that operationalise not only top-down communication, but also from followers to movement activists.

Comparing the data obtained in indicators 3 and 4, which correspond to the use of cartoons and caricatures in posts by both activists and followers of the pages, of the five movements that allow posts by followers, three (O Povo é Quem Mais Ordena, Indignados Lisboa and Artigo 21°) have higher scores in indicator 1.4 compared to indicator 1.3. This shows that in this period followers mobilised this type of resource more frequently than activists did. Between the two remaining movements (RiseUp Portugal and Democracia e Dívida) there is a tie. Which allows us

to state that in only one of the eight movements studied (FLAN Colectivo), the activists made more use of this type of illustration and resource. Incidentally, this movement does not allow the sharing of content to the followers. Although this last movement in its manifesto⁹ stresses the importance of the imagistic and humorous communication of its action, it is only done in a top-down logic.

The content analysis revealed that humour and satire are frequently used on the Facebook pages of anti-austerity movements. The most common forms of humour include memes, jokes and cartoons, while satire is manifested through parodies, irony and sarcasm. The results of the interviews indicate that activists see humour and satire as important tools for: 1) Sensitising the public about social and political issues: Humour and satire can be used to draw attention to social and political problems, making them more accessible and less intimidating for the general public; 2) Mobilising social action: Humour and satire can motivate people to get involved in social and political action, encouraging them to question the status quo and demand change; 3) Create a sense of community: Humour and satire can help create a sense of community between activists and their followers, strengthening social bonds and a sense of belonging; 4) Challenging power: Humour and satire can be used to challenge power structures and question the legitimacy of authorities.

4.2 Discourses and Representations of the Interviewees

The data presented here come from the four questions that made up the interview script for the activists and that allowed us to approach different aspects of the theme we defined as object of reflection.

In a clear reference to their nativism and digital activism, the two activists of RiseUp Portugal argue that their goal is essentially digital mobilization, through the dissemination of information, as a way of drawing attention and raising awareness of the followers by stating: "So, my "business" will not exactly be mobilization. We are not specialised in mobilisation" (RUP1).

Although somewhat disguised, the activist recognises that the use of humour and satire is not frequent in her movement: "It is fundamental, to laugh and laugh at ourselves, not only from the outside but also from within. However, it is fundamental because humour is something that works well in Portugal. I can say, we'll resort to it more now. That's already left. Creating political awareness" (QSLT). Prompted to elaborate on the role of humour, the 15 Outubro activist mentions that: "No, I think that in all actions you try to make a recourse to humour, something ironic. Of course, it also must have a combative part, it can't just be irony, but sometimes it is important, you try to have some frequency".

Just like the use of humour, the use of Facebook and its potential to mobilise other actors is also perceived with some scepticism, at least this is what can be drawn from the statements of the Democracia e Dívida activist when he said, "Facebook is not exactly a very effective means of mobilisation. If for example I go on Facebook and say, "I'm going to do something at the Gulbenkian", then people don't show up much". In this sense, the Que se Lixe a Troika activist also declares that the mobilising capacity does not depend decisively on Facebook's possibilities: "But

the events always succeed when someone takes them somewhere and starts doing them. And then it's no longer up to us, it's no longer in our control". This implies that mobilisation is, from the perspective of these activists, more the result of the socio-economic and political circumstances than of what can be said and done on social networks such as Facebook.

Regarding the means that these activists have at their disposal, the general note is one of scarcity and even a certain criticism of organisations with higher institutional levels such as the trade unions, which, according to them, have more means. The activist from O Povo é Quem Mais Ordena¹⁰ sums up the general tone by emphasising this scarcity in her speech "Flyers we only did when there were demonstrations. For we had that, this is hard. It's all on us (funding). For example, our banner, which we have, we made a very identical one, he there (Porto) and I here (Lisbon), we made it by hand. We didn't have it made by hand". Allusions to the resources mobilised by interviewees and their movements, when questioned, were invariably directed towards actions in a real context, never for example to the production of videos or other content that appealed to mobilisation, which were primarily used on Facebook or other digital platforms.

The results show that humour and satire are valuable tools for civic and political activism on Facebook. By using these resources, anti-austerity movements and their followers can raise public awareness of social and political issues, mobilize social action, create a sense of community and challenge power. However, it is important to note that the use of humour and satire can also have risks. If not used carefully, these resources can be seen as offensive, alienate the public and even harm the cause of the movement, ultimately creating rifts between the community when they were intended to unite it. This is a risk that has already been identified in the literature (KUHN, 2007).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

This study sought to analyse the role of humour and satire as tools for mobilization and political communication in anti-austerity movements in Portugal, with a focus on the dynamics of interaction between activists and followers on Facebook. The aim was to understand how these strategies are appropriated by different actors, exploring their potential and limitations in the context of digital activism. The empirical analysis, based on a mixed approach of content analysis and semi-structured interviews, allowed a critical evaluation of two central hypotheses formulated at the beginning of the research.

The first hypothesis, which proposed that the use of humour and satire would be positively associated with greater civic and political mobilization among activists, proved to be partially refuted. Although humour is recognized as a relevant tool by the activists interviewed, the data suggests that followers play a more active role in the creation and dissemination of humorous content. Memes, cartoons and parodies were the main humorous resources analysed and were widely used by

followers to enhance the movements' messages (COHEN, 2007). This pattern reflects the participatory dynamic characteristic of digital social networks, where users act simultaneously as consumers and producers of content, as described by Bruns (2008) in the concept of produsage.

Activists, on the other hand, have shown a more limited and cautious approach to mobilizing humorous resources. This restriction seems to be associated both with material limitations, such as the scarcity of financial resources for content production, and with concerns about public accountability. Movements such as "O Povo é Quem Mais Ordena" and "Indignados Lisboa" stood out for their more consistent integration of humour into their strategies, but even in these cases, the participation of followers was crucial to boosting discursive practices. These results challenge the traditional view that activists lead all discursive fronts in social movements and are in line with Milner's (2013) observations, which highlight the importance of followers in creating humorous narratives in protest contexts.

The second hypothesis, which suggested that activists' discourse on humour is characterized by spontaneity and what they perceive as the "taste" of their followers, found partial support. The interviews revealed that activists recognize the appeal of humour among followers but often see its use as secondary or complementary to traditional mobilization strategies. In addition, the idea of "spontaneity" seems to be more linked to Facebook's algorithmic logic, which favours humorous and visual content, than to a deliberate intention to integrate humour as a central element of activist practices. Studies such as those by Woolley and Howard (2018) underline that the architecture of digital platforms significantly influences the discursive choices of political actors, favouring content that generates greater interaction and engagement.

Although activists consider humour to be a useful tool for mobilizing the public and creating community ties, empirical analysis suggests that this approach is limited by the perceived risks associated with the use of humour in politically polarized contexts. Studies such as those by Rajagopalan (1996) and Lesmana (2021) warn of the potential exclusionary effects of humour, particularly in heterogeneous cultural contexts, where different interpretations can alienate part of the public or generate conflict. This risk was mentioned by activists, who expressed concerns about the ability of humour to mobilize widely without compromising the political message.

The empirical results highlighted significant trends. Firstly, followers emerge as central agents in the mobilization of humour and satire. Through the creation of memes (CHAGAS, 2020; PETTI, 2020), ironic comments and other humorous content, followers not only amplify the movements' messages, but also contribute to the construction of alternative narratives to the dominant discourse. This participatory dynamic reinforces the idea that humour is a powerful tool for engaging audiences and promoting political dialogue in digital environments, as argued by Hauber and Maia (2022).

Secondly, by prioritizing face-to-face mobilization strategies and more traditional discourses, activists limit the potential of humour as a strategic resource. This approach reflects both material limitations and a perception of public responsibility that inhibits the adoption of bolder humorous

practices. However, by relegating humour to a secondary role, activists miss opportunities to exploit its potential to challenge power structures and mobilize more inclusively and effectively.

Finally, the analysis revealed that the architecture of digital platforms plays a crucial role in mediating humour in activism. Facebook, in particular, favours content that generates quick and visually appealing engagement, conditioning both activists and followers to adapt their discursive practices to algorithmic dynamics. This finding is in line with the arguments of Margetts (2013), who underline the importance of digital platforms in defining the communication strategies of social movements.

The results of this study have significant implications for the practice of social movements and for understanding the role of humour in digital activism. Firstly, movements could benefit from greater strategic integration of humour into their campaigns, exploiting its potential to raise awareness among followers and public opinion, strengthen community ties and challenge cultural norms. This approach requires investment in training, partnerships with digital creators and the use of analytical tools to better understand followers' preferences.

At the same time, activists should consider the specificities of digital platforms when designing their discursive strategies. Adapting to algorithmic dynamics can maximize the reach and impact of humorous messages, promoting broader and more inclusive engagement. However, it is crucial that this adaptation is accompanied by a critical reflection on the risks associated with humour, including the exclusion of audiences and the possibility of reinforcing polarizations.

This study has some limitations that deserve attention. Firstly, the analysis focused exclusively on anti-austerity movements in Portugal and on the digital platform Facebook, which may not reflect the diversity of humorous practices in other cultural contexts and digital social networks. Also, the interview sample mainly included activists with formal roles in the movements, excluding potential perspectives from informal members or less involved followers.

Future research could expand this framework by exploring the role of humour on emerging platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, where visual creativity and humour have distinct characteristics. Comparative studies between different countries and political cultures would also be valuable in understanding variations in humorous practices and mobilization dynamics. Indeed, a longitudinal analysis could offer relevant insights into how the use of humour evolves over time in response to technological and political changes.

This research contributes to the debate on the role of humour and satire in digital activism, highlighting both its potential and its limitations. Followers emerge as the main agents in mobilizing humour, using these tools to boost messages and challenge dominant narratives. On the other hand, activists show a more cautious and restrictive approach, influenced by material limitations and the perception of public responsibility.

The strategic integration of humour into digital activism requires a careful balance between creativity and inclusion, considering the risks associated with using humour in politically polarized contexts.

With a more collaborative and innovative approach, humour can be a powerful tool to promote political engagement, challenge power structures and strengthen community ties in digital contexts.

This reflection reinforces the importance of understanding humour not just as an aesthetic or playful element, but as a communication practice with transformative potential. Future research could deepen this debate, exploring new tools and approaches that maximize the impact of humour on political and civic activism, promoting a more plural and deliberative public sphere. In the final analysis, humour and satire (as tools of activism) reveal themselves to be simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, mobilizing yet divisive. They reflect the complex dynamics of the digital public sphere. These mismatched encounters highlight how the appropriation of humour and satire in civic and political activism on Facebook is marked by structural, cultural and technological tensions. This challenges us to reimagine engagement methods in the digital age; however, it also raises questions about effectiveness. Although these forms of expression can foster connection, they can also alienate certain audiences because of their inherent contradictions.

Notes

¹The penetration of internet access among the Portuguese population in 2010 was 55.1%, rising to 60.3% in 2012 and to 78.3% in 2020. This trend towards democratization of internet access is also evident in the number of families with access, since in 2010 it was 53.1%, rising to 61% in 2012, and finally to 84.5% in 2020. Available at: https://www.pordata.pt/Subtema/Portugal/Sociedade+de+Informa%c3%a7%c3%a3o+e+Telecomunica%c3%a7%c3%b5es-92. Accessed: 11 May 2024

² It refers to the Single Social Tax and consists of the contribution of employers and employees to Social Security. The then government, led by Pedro Passos Coelho, decided to lower the employers' contribution, with the workers having a greater proportion of this contribution. This measure was very symbolic and was withdrawn after a few days.

³The media estimates over half a million participants: https://www.publico.pt/2012/09/15/politica/noticia/que-se-lixe-a-troika-os-protestos-sairam-a-rua-1563204. Accessed: 15 March 2024.

⁴Meanwhile, Article 21 no longer has a Facebook page. Which may be an indication of the current total, or partial inactivity of this activist movement.

⁵This was composed of twenty questions. For the issue of humor, three questions were asked: "16th How do you perceive the role of humor in the Organization's actions? How often do you use it? And for what purpose? 17th Do you make use of other media beyond Facebook? For example, posters, murals, graffiti. How do you mobilize funding for this? 18. Which strategy do you think is the most effective and has the greatest capacity for mobilization within your organization? How?"

⁶The message sent to each of the pages of the eight movements on July 18, 2013 read: "Good morning, My name is (...) and I'm doing my Master's dissertation at the Sociology Department of the University of Beira Interior (Covilhã) entitled: "Alternative political participation on Facebook: continuities and reconfigurations". It is in this context that I would like to ask for your precious collaboration, which consists of a face-to-face interview (40 minutes), at a time and place that best suits you. In addition to the information I have already mentioned, I would also like to include my personal page at the laboratory where I work. Thank you in advance for your availability. http://www.labcom.ubi.pt/sub/investigador/e491709bbc199dec25a2e71cac3555af".

⁷ It should be noted that after several attempts it was not possible to obtain a response from activists of the FLAN Colectivo and Artigo 21° movements in order to conduct an interview.

⁸ It was not possible to ascertain the exact number of posts by the Artigo 21º movement as this page no longer exists.

⁹ FLAN Colectivo is a Portuguese artistic collective that aims essentially to communicate, in a sometimes burlesque and even satirical way, with the purpose of transmitting a message of social awareness." Accessible here: https://www.facebook.com/pg/flanparatodos/about/?ref=page_internal.

¹⁰The name of this movement refers to the music that was the password for a song by José Afonso that was at the beginning of the operations of the revolution of April 25, 1974.

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