Digital Artivisms: Creative Practices, Digital Technologies, and Political Participation Among Young Portuguese Artivists

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This article discusses young people's uses of the Internet and digital platforms as a central resource for their civic intervention in the production and dissemination of specific content linked to artistic practices. We set out to find what repercussions digital technologies have in this specific field of "artivism." We argue that digital media not only presents itself as a public space for intervention and debate but also offers a field for creative experimentation and for the production and circulation of aesthetic content. To this end, we analyze recent empirical data collected as part of a research project on young activists in Portugal, aiming at the articulation between creative practices, activism, and civic intervention. Following a qualitative research frame, about 50 young people mobilized around different causes were interviewed. In our analysis, we highlight 3 main functions that stand out in the interviews: (a) communicational functions, (b) creative and artistic functions, and (c) identity and emotional functions.

Keywords: artivism, digital media, young people, political participation

The issue of Internet and digital technology use in the field of political action and, above all, activism, has been widely explored, having gained particular notoriety during the troubled historical period that commenced in 2011 with the so-called Arab Spring. This was a period followed by various episodes that featured strong political turmoil in different parts of the world, ranging from the international Occupy movement to the antiausterity protests in southern European countries (Amaral, 2020; Fernandez-Planells, Figueras-Maz, & Pàmpols, 2014; Gerbaudo, 2012; Micó & Casero-Ripollés, 2014; Penney & Dadas, 2014; Postill, 2014; Simões, Campos, Pereira, Esteves, & Nofre, 2018; Theocharis, Lowe, & García-Albacete, 2015; Treré, Jeppesen, & Mattoni, 2017). What became evident from these movements is that forms of popular mobilization and protest have taken an increasingly hybrid format (Castells, 2012). Digital technologies

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have become unavoidable tools, even giving rise to new social practices in the field of noninstitutional political action.

It has also become evident that this trend has been accompanied by other fundamental changes of a societal nature that involve new articulations between citizens, the political field, and its actors (Dahlgren, 2013). Several authors have highlighted the gradual distancing of citizens from institutional politics and a growing distrust of traditional actors (Farthing, 2010; Pickard, 2019). Others have highlighted the growth of noninstitutional participation phenomena, of a more fluid and horizontal nature, in direct response to concrete problems and causes (Pitti, 2018). And yet other researchers highlight the trend toward greater fragmentation and individualization of political action, with an increasing overlap between the public and private spheres (Bennett, 2012; Papacharissi, 2008). These trends seem to be accentuated when we refer to the case of young people (Loader, Vromen, & Xenos, 2014).

This dynamic seems to contradict a representation repeatedly conveyed in the public sphere that defines youth as a destabilizing and/or menacing element. Defined by the media and political actors as apathetic, disinterested, or alienated, they are recurrently defined more as a problem than a solution to the dilemmas and impasses of democracy (Benedicto, 2013). Yet, opposite of this pessimistic (and tendentiously moralistic) reading of the role of young people, another approach highlights less evident facets of their political participation (Gagnon, 2017; Malafaia, Ferreira, & Menezes, 2021; Pickard, 2019; Pitti, 2018). From a general standpoint, authors who position themselves within this framework emphasize that young people do participate, but that they do so through less visible channels and practices, and will often engage in causes that are ignored, at times even belittled, by the political class. Their vaunted lack of interest in institutional politics is accompanied by greater dynamism in fields of political action in which digital technologies gain special prominence, and that also mix leisure and pleasure, alongside private and the public worlds. So, although not outright exclusive to this age group, digital activism has been especially associated with young people.

This article aims to contribute to this discussion based on recent empirical data collected as part of a research project on young activists in Portugal, focusing on the articulation between creative practices, activism, and civic intervention. We adopt a very broad definition of youth, applying a demographic range that allows us to study different stages of young people's lives, including both teenagers and young adults. This approach gives particular attention to the heterogeneity of young people, a factor that seems important to us, since this is not a homogeneous age group (Pickard, 2019; Roberts, 2003). Within the scope of this research, about 50 young people mobilized around different causes were interviewed. Issues around digital use were discussed within the scope of the interviews, comprising a specific section of the interview schedule. With this article, we will focus on young people who use the Internet and digital platforms as a central resource for their civic intervention, in the production and dissemination of specific content linked to artistic practices. We therefore focus on the field of "artivism." We set out to find what repercussions digital technologies have in this specific field. We argue that the Internet provides resources that facilitate and shape forms of artivist intervention. Digital media not only presents itself as a public space for intervention and debate but also offers a field for creative experimentation and for the production and circulation of aesthetic content. In our analysis, we highlight three functional categories that stand out in the interviews: communicational functions, creative and artistic functions, and identity and emotional functions.

Digital Media and Youth Political Participation: A State of the Art

There seems to be a consensus about the growing lack of political participation of young people at the institutional level (Farthing, 2010; Pickard, 2019; Pitti, 2018). Youth feel increasingly distant from electoral and party politics, a fact that's been pointed out as problematic, endangering the democratic system. However, it has also been shown that politics is not limited to the periodic electoral act, and even less so to party politics (Collin, 2015; Sloam, 2016). Young people have been described as particularly active in spheres of nonconventional or nonelectoral politics (Pickard, 2019; Pitti, 2018). This, on the one hand, is a reaction to disillusionment with traditional political actors, while, on the other hand, is inherent to young people's ways and lifestyles.

The invisibility or downplaying of youth political action stems from the social roles assigned to them, as well as from the practices and causes that are dear to them. The political field dominated by adults and by an adult-centric worldview has difficulty recognizing as legitimate many of the practices and struggles in which young people get involved. On the one hand, about practices, these are often seen as innocuous, irrelevant, and frivolous, as they combine playfulness, pleasure, and sociability with political intervention. In fact, part of the intervention of young people involves the festivalization of politics and the inclusion of politics in cultural, artistic, and digital production (Pitti, 2018; Soep, 2014; St John, 2008). In the youth realm, we thus find greater creativity and innovation in the languages and forms of expression used (Pickard, 2019), where cultural and political dimensions, and the private and public spheres converge (and intersect). In this context, Pickard (2019) introduces the term "DIO politics" to describe the environment in which younger generations move:

> We can observe a mounting emphasis on imaginative, non-electoral kinds of political participation, which function outside electoral politics that expand the political participation repertoire. Many forms constitute what I call DIO politics (Do-It-Ourselves political participation), whereby young people take the initiative to participate offline and online with other like-minded citizens, as part of a shared experience in politics operating outside political institutions. (p. 77)

On the other hand, several authors draw attention to the fact that young people mobilize themselves more around specific causes (Collin, 2015; Farthing, 2010; Sloam, 2016), to the detriment of more conventional partisan ideologies. There are, therefore, issues that are less visible to the eyes of adults and institutions, associated with minority interests, that become secondary or even outright unrecognized by older generations and more traditional institutions. The climate issue, LGBTQI+ rights, animal rights, and anti-racism, among others, are just a few fields of intervention that have been able to capture the attentions of young people.

One area that has recurrently been described as a field where innovative forms of civic and political intervention emerge is the Internet. The ubiquity of the digital, which crosses different spheres of everyday life, has obvious repercussions in terms of communication and political action (Bennett, 2012; Brites, Ponte, & Menezes, 2017; Gerbaudo, 2012; Schäfer, 2016; Soep, 2014). This is evident within the scope of institutional policy, and today, it is impossible to think about logistics, organization, communication, and political mobilization

without the use of digital platforms. If this is unavoidable at the level of legitimized institutional action, the fact of the matter is that recent times have revealed unregulated and more obscure facets of such platforms, namely social networks, with direct impacts on the political system. Problems associated with fake news and conspiracy theories, that have directly affected elections in such countries as the United States and Brazil, have drawn attention to the powerful influence of digital social networks and their abilities to decisively interfere with electoral results (Recuero, Soares, & Gruzd, 2020; Sharma, Ferrara, & Liu, 2022).

Recent times have also demonstrated the power of digital networks and devices when it comes to political action of a more disruptive nature that operates on the fringes of institutional political systems. So-called digital activism, composed by a set of actions, can either assume a guerrilla configuration (hacktivism), or can be understood as a tool that facilitates or renews old repertoires of political action deriving from social movements and/or individual activists (Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). Several authors have highlighted a set of functions that are performed by these tools and that translate into an increase in the effectiveness of activist action at different levels (Campos, Simões, & Pereira, 2018; Milan, 2013). Digital media makes it easier to assemble networks and groups, facilitating communication, recruitment, and mobilization of people around certain common problems and struggles. In this sense, although not having replaced old formulas of action and the role of the streets and physical spaces as action fronts, there's little denying that the Internet has expanded the field of intervention. There is an obvious dimension of these struggles that currently acquires a type of visibility mainly online, be it through communication on blogs, social networks, and other platforms, or through virtual initiatives (cyberattacks, online petitions, and so on). Nevertheless, as several authors have pointed out (Castells, 2012; Treré, 2019) this is a territory that can be defined as hybrid, involving a continuous overlap between the online and the offline spheres. These days, no physical event is carried out without being in articulation with the online world, whether through forms of mobilization via social networks or streamed audiovisual recordings, among other actions. There is an obvious convergence of different communication platforms for different purposes, which reveals the difficulty in establishing rigid boundaries between each of them.

The digital world is understood as a civic and political action catalyst, as well as a galvanizer when it comes to young people, serving to contradict the pessimism of many analysts (Banaji & Buckingham, 2013). Digital media and related circuits contribute decisively to the enhancement of youth interests in political and civic causes by broadening the scope of interventive action and providing a more appealing territory of participation. This falls in line with the interconnected and personalized way young people engage in political affairs (Loader et al., 2014). Resultingly, obstacles to political participation are mitigated in consequence of using digital resources as informal means of political involvement, reinforced by their open and decentralized features. In this regard, Livingstone (2011) highlights the following:

> Intriguingly, there appears to be a promising match between the style of deliberation afforded by the Internet and that preferred by the very population segment—young people—who are in many ways the most disengaged from traditional forms of political activity. The very architecture of the Internet, with its flexible, hypertextual, networked structure, its dialogic mode of address, and its alternative, even anarchic feel, particularly appeals to young people, contrasting with the traditional, linear, hierarchical, logical, rule-governed conventions often used in official communications with youth. (p. 357)

This has implications for the way young people individually participate in different civically relevant issues in two ways: on the one hand, by transforming their personal concerns and interests into political causes possessing a global reach (see, for instance, the case of the student climate strike), and on the other hand, the easy access to digital media may transform the way they get involved collectively. Digital networks are at times, the first step toward the creation of associations and collectives mobilized around certain causes. Whatever the case, though, digital media plays a fundamental role in the mobilization, organization, and formation of networks, also having consequences when it comes to developing collective identities (Gerbaudo & Treré, 2015; Milan, 2015).

In the last decade, several examples corroborate this. In many social movements and protest actions around the globe, digital networks became one of the epicenters of the hybrid media ecology that emerged (Treré, 2019). Several authors highlighted that young people have assumed a central role in many of these movements (Ancelovici, Dufour, & Nez, 2016; Flesher Fominaya & Cox, 2013; Pickerill, Krinsky, Hayes, Gillan, & Doherty, 2014; Tejerina, Perrugoría, Benski, & Langman, 2013). In this "new ecology," the Internet coexists with other means of communication and intervention contexts. As a consequence of this convergence, boundaries between communication platforms become eroded, as did distinctions between online and offline contexts now no longer regarded as useful.

Methodology

This article's aims are based on recent empirical data collected as part of a research project on young activists in Portugal (2018–2022).[2] Our primary goal is to study how different youth protagonists, individually or collectively, commit themselves to multiple social, cultural, and political causes, employing specific resources and creative grammars as forms of expression and citizenship participation. To this end, a conceptual and analytical framework was defined that accounted for the intersection between two axes. The first axis, termed "resources and grammars," considers different materials and resources mobilized when acting out in the political sphere. We considered four types of resources, namely: the body, image, sound, and technology. Our concern was to understand how these resources give rise to practices and languages that are used in activist actions and in the exercise of citizenship on the part of young people. A second axis is that of "territories and stages." This axis transports us to the spaces (territories) where political participation takes place and citizenship is exercised, spaces that are considered performative fields (stages). In the context of the research, this axis is basically composed of two types of territories, which are central to nonconventional political participation: the urban public space and the virtual space. The project, therefore, does not focus exclusively on issues related to the use of the Internet and digital devices, although, as it turned out, these are omnipresent elements.

From a methodological point of view, this is a project of a qualitative nature, employing different techniques of data collection and analysis, framed within the logic of methodological triangulation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2005). In addition to an ethnographic approach, videos and in-depth interviews were produced relying on a broad interview schedule. Geographically, the research centers on the

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[2] ArtCitizenship—Young people and the arts of citizenship: activism, participatory culture, and creative practices.

Metropolitan Areas of Lisbon and Porto, and includes young people between the ages of 14 and 35. The diversity of profiles in the population sample results from two sample collecting strategies: on the one hand, the plurality of social practices under analysis that refers to the first analytical axis, involving the use of sound, image, body, and technology. On the other hand, various social struggles and causes (anti-racist, feminist, ecological-environmental, LGBTQ+, and so on). The sample was constituted via a snowballing process (Burgess, 1984). With this project being ethnographically based, entering the field allowed us to identify a group of relevant actors who then facilitated our access to other individuals, who involve themselves in certain causes or in artist/activist practices. The interviews were, in large part, individual and carried out face-to-face,[3] guided by a very open interview schedule centering on major themes (political biography, activist practices, creative/artistic practices, representations of the political/activist context). A total of 69 interviews[4] were carried out, of which approximately 50 interviews were selected for coding and analysis using MAXQDA software.[5] The constructed categories resulted from the themes present in the interview schedule and from the previously identified axes (axis 1—image, sound, body, and technology, and axis 2—street /offline and Internet/online). For this particular article, an analysis of the categories created around the uses and representations of digital media was carried out.

Digital Artivism

The project focused on the articulation between creative practices and forms of civic intervention and activism by young people. In defining creative practices, we considered a wide range of actions, including artistic practices *stricto sensu* (music, illustration, painting, performance, and so on), or others that are more ambivalent and may be perceived as not entirely artistic in nature (e.g., podcast, blog, or meme production). This broad objective led us to revisit the relationship between the terms "activism" and "art," two nonconsensual terms for the interviewees and, even less so when it comes to the neologism formed by the combination of the two, that of "artivism." Being an ambiguous concept, artivism involves multiple practices and lends itself to different interpretations; thus, it is worthy of some clarification. Sandoval and Latorre (2008) offer us a definition that recognizes that this is a "hybrid neologism that signifies work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism" (p. 82). In this sense, "aesthetics" acquires an unmistakable political feature, evident in the attributes of the objects created, but also in the performativity inherent to protest actions. Generally speaking, literature on the subject points to a series of characteristics defining these forms of expression (Mateos & Sedeño, 2018; Mekdjian, 2018; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008; Zebracki, 2020): (a) they have as their central objective that of social transformation; (b) they possess a critical and subversive dimension; (c) they aim at the

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[3] The pandemic period and the respective lockdown forced us to resort to digital devices, with some interviews being carried out through such means. The interviewees were informed about the project and its objectives, having agreed orally or in writing to their participation as interviewees. Their anonymity was guaranteed in all project outputs. In cases where this was not possible, authorization was requested to make their names (or artistic pseudonyms) public.

[4] This number includes exploratory interviews and interviews with privileged interlocutors in the fields of art and/or activism. Some of these interviewees were over 35 years old.

[5] The ethnographic work and interviews was done mainly by Alix Sarrouy and the data processing with MAXQDA software by Gabriela Leal, both team members of the ArtCitizenship project.

empowerment and visibility of stigmatized and subordinated individuals and communities; (d) they often operate outside the purposes, mechanisms and structures of the art market and its institutions; and (e) they generally promote more democratic mechanisms of participation and access to art and artistic practices.

Given the democratization of access to technologies and digital networks, the virtual world can be understood as a new public sphere (Papacharissi, 2008; Schäfer, 2016). On digital platforms and networks, communities and contexts emerge where debate, participation and engaged artistic expression can proliferate. Consequently, digital artivism reveals itself as a field of extraordinary relevance, as has been pointed out by several authors (Rhoades, 2012; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008). Zebracki and Luger (2019) suggest that we rethink the notion of public art based on the intersections between online and offline. They employ the concept of digital public art, understood as that which is produced, mediated, curated, and evaluated through digital circuits and gains public expression within this context. In this setting, it is necessary to be attentive to the dimensions related to creation and politics. We especially highlight the importance of cocreation and participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), which, given their very notable presence in this field, challenge the traditional notions of authorship and individuality present in the field of art (Prior, 2010). Furthermore, another issue that deserves attention refers to the empowering and emancipating role of the digital and its association with artistic practices. Digital artivism seems to be specially tailored for young people and minority groups, as it makes it possible to bypass adultcentric and hegemonic contexts and discourses (Rhoades, 2012; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008).

Our interviewees correspond to varied profiles. In addition to the differences resulting from individual trajectories, the variations revealed depend on the areas of intervention and association to specific causes (LGBTQI+, climate struggle, anti-racism, and more), as well as the fields of artistic creativity that appear linked to specific languages and aesthetics. Within this research, as previously mentioned, the fields of creativity range from image (associated with visual and pictorial arts) to the body (performing arts), to sound (musical/sound arts), and to technology (technological artifacts and digital media). The specific combination of all these elements results in a *sui generis* way of considering the relationship between aesthetics and politics, which assumes a very particular configuration in the case of young people. It is also worth noting that the narratives provided by our interviewees about their practices and identities are varied. There are activists who do not recognize themselves in this role, even if they have been actively involved in certain causes for several years; this in the same way that there are artists who, although dedicate themselves to artivist practices, do not assume themselves as "artivists." Beyond personal reasons, this is, on the one hand, because of the way activists use "arts" or "creativity" in their practices and, on the other hand, the way artists dedicate themselves to activism.

This clarification brings us back to the question of the use of technologies and digital media in activist practices. In this analysis, we will focus on activists with an artistic profile, highlighting the multiple functions of digital technology in activist creative practices. Left out will be other functions that we also identified in other research contexts (Campos et al., 2018; Campos & Silva, 2023; Simões et al., 2018), but that are not intended to explore artistic and creative uses of digital technology. We can unequivocally point out that, despite the

criticisms,[6] digital technologies and platforms are considered central elements for activist and the artistic work of those interviewed. Such resources enhance creative work insofar as they make the production and circulation of content accessible and economic. This has been widely highlighted in the literature, with emphasis placed on that digital technologies facilitate access to the tools that enable production and dissemination of cultural and artistic outputs, giving rise to the "serious amateur" persona (Buckingham, 2017), thus diluting borders between the amateur and the professional, and the consumer and the producer. Several authors (Prior, 2010; van Dijk, 2014) also point out that these devices enhance creativity, as they provide a set of tools that, a few decades ago, were monopolized by the cultural and entertainment industries within a field dominated by specialists and professionals of different kinds. Resultingly, digital tools undoubtedly contribute to the DIY spirit that, as repeatedly stated by several interviewees, is an integral part of the activist praxis. We therefore argue that these practices fall within the field of what can be identified as "digital artivism" (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008), a field of intervention and political participation that employs digital devices and channels to produce and disseminate socially engaged aesthetic and artistic content.

The Functions of Technologies and Digital Media in Artivism

The analysis of the interviews allowed us to identify eight main functions performed by the digital in artivist practices. Although not all of them have the same weight in the discourses, they are all directly related to the communicative potential of the Internet, which opens up several possibilities, both for the dissemination of content and for its consumption in an interactive and circular logic. These functions also refer to different social spheres. Some refer to issues of a cognitive and informational nature, others to emotional and affective issues and, third, to creative and artistic issues. Needless to say, these overlap, and this is particularly evident in the speeches. Here is a list of the identified functions:

A. Access to information/knowledge/reflection (concerning causes, interests, artistic/activists practices);
B. Personal/affective support;
C. Communication/interaction/networks;
D. Sharing/expression of identity;
E. Form of creative/artistic and/or activist expression;
F. Resource for artistic/creative and activist practices;
G. Personal and/or cause-related publicity/promotion (portfolio, contact with the public);
H. Opportunities for creative/artistic and/or activist work.

We will analyze these functions grouped into three broad categories that include communicational functions (referring to forms of disseminating work, acquiring knowledge, interacting with, and creating audiences and networks), artistic functions (with a focus on the expression of creativity), and, finally, affective and emotional issues (associated with the expression of individuality and emotional connection to others).

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6 Several interviewees also pointed out a set of criticisms and resistances to the digital world, particularly to digital networks, namely with regard to the risks they represent in terms of users' mental health, electronic surveillance, and the creation of echo chambers.

Functions of a Communicational Scope

All discourses around the role of the Internet and digital devices refer to their communicational potential. Digital media are seen as communication circuits that present a series of advantages when compared with conventional communication channels. These advantages have been highlighted in the literature, underlining the ease of access and use, individualized use, the speed and extension of communication channels, and the interactive and horizontal nature of communication, among others (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). These aspects are stressed throughout our interviews, reinforcing what are common and shared ideas about the role of these devices. That we are dealing with artists who play a role in social intervention and activism makes these issues even more evident, insofar as two different strands and communicational logics coexist that commonly intertwine. Compared with other uses of digital technology in activism, there are logics and ambitions related to artistic practice and the functioning of the artistic field that, to a large extent, determine the way digital devices are employed. Thus, if we consider these as communication tools, what we find in many of the cases analyzed is a communication strategy that accounts for two types of audiences that can overlap: on one hand, we have the (potential) *recipients of the political message*; on the other, the *art-oriented audience*, those more attentive to the aesthetic content in question. We are therefore faced with two logics, each corresponding to two different social fields, with audiences that may possess different forms of capital, positions, and ambitions. Very common in the discourses collected is the idea that the existence of the artistic persona is largely dependent on digital visibility. Rita and Vera,[7] two young female rappers, explain this in the following manner:

> Nowadays everything happens on social media. If it's not on social media, it's as if it doesn't exist, because nowadays all businesses, all works are presented in the digital environment. And so . . . the digital environment has become more and more popular and more important for us to expand our work, whatever it may be. (Rita, rapper, 23 years old, 2021)

> But I would say that it's a place [social networks] where the potential is great to get the message across. (. . .) You can easily get to Japan, Brazil, to an asylum or to a school, you have no idea where you can reach. So, it's up to us to decide what we can make happen. And getting as much out of it is knowing how to use the tool, through the algorithm, promotion, etc. Militancy needs to study this and update itself. (Vera, rapper, 33 years old, 2020)

Something that is very present in the interviewees' discourses is the idea that communication does not have a unidirectional sense. From this perspective, the Internet also assumes itself as a privileged channel: on the one hand, for the acquisition of information and knowledge, and on the other, for interacting with the general public, and especially when it comes to monitoring the impact of the tasks at hand. Many perceive that if the Internet is a privileged channel for the dissemination of their work and activist causes, it is, on par, a fundamental tool for acquiring knowledge, within a logic marked by circularity and reciprocity.

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[7] All the names used in this article are pseudonyms.

Resultingly, there is a certain idea of community that is formed online, around certain causes and through the sharing of content that can be both informative and aesthetic.

The construction of a virtual audience is monitored by the artists through the platforms used that facilitate interaction. In this sense, it is reported by several interviewees that the feedback received is a fundamental element that encourages artistic activity. This interaction and the ability to share content facilitates the construction of a community that translates, for example, in the number of followers of certain pages. Consequently, presence in the virtual world has an enormous capacity to multiply the connections between people who share interests and practices, reinforcing the perspective of a true virtual community. Two of our interviewees explained the importance of the Internet in the following manner:

> You're writing texts, creating blogs and whatever else, but there is an important part of artivism that people forget, which is . . . the message, passing on knowledge and . . . and I say that . . . I say it from my own experience, because I was extremely ignorant about Black narratives and Black feminism. I learned about all that on the Internet, from personal accounts and materials that . . . that other women made available to me. (Carla, illustrator and visual artist, 27 years old, 2020)

> Before, all artists had a page on DeviantArt. But then it stopped being so popular and everyone started moving to Tumblr. And then came Instagram, where there was an immediacy of likes. Even if you had few followers, you had a lot of likes. . . . And on Instagram, since it was chronological, it would appear. So, I started seeing Instagram as a place where I could put whatever I wanted on it. . . . Fortunately, I discovered many people in Portugal. Because the community of artists on Instagram in Portugal is somewhat close to each other. (Cris, illustrator, 25 years old, 2020)

Functions of a Creative and Artistic Scope

One of the aspects explored in our research concerned the creative processes promoted by technology. In this case, we are not only talking about the possibility of being a vehicle of communication but also of offering a range of possibilities for the articulation of visual, sound, and textual contents. Allied to the use of these technologies, therefore, is the dimension of technique (specific ways of using and taking advantage of software/hardware), along with *language* and *aesthetics*. This is to say that digital technologies determine a field of possibilities of expression, defining an aesthetic and a language. In this sense, they can constitute fundamental elements for the creation of an artivist identity, insofar as they link artistic production to a certain style and framework that results from the characteristics of certain platforms. The literature on digital artivism reveals precisely the relevance that this particular field of artistic and activist practice has assumed in recent years. The easy access, and the multiplicity of production and dissemination of digital resources, are key factors that attract many of those who wish to create artivist contents. This is particularly relevant for young people (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008) but also for minorities and stigmatized social communities and groups (Hart, 2015; Rhoades, 2012).

One of the young women interviewed, despite having a history of conventional activist participation on different fronts, discovered herself as an artivist through the use of Instagram. The existence of this artistic persona with a pseudonym created for this purpose clearly coincides with her first experiences of Instagram. Her work is primarily designed and shaped accounting for the characteristics of this platform. The following excerpt reflects the beginning of this articulation:

> I decided I was going to illustrate this theme of harassment. . . . And so I did. And since then, having created this page [on Instagram], I try to explore not only issues related to harassment and feminism, but also other things like capitalism. Only now can I begin to consider myself an artivist because, before, I always associated the person with the work . . . I would say that I now address several issues, ranging from anti-capitalism to feminism, veganism, animal liberation, women's rights, workers' rights. . . . And I try to expose these situations, often in a satirical or comic way, through characters. which are nonhuman animals with anthropomorphic characteristics. (Maria, illustrator and visual artist, Illustrator/artivist, 31 years old, 2020)

In this case, Instagram is used strategically to publicize the work and create a wide network of followers. As we have come to know, the greatest potential represented by such tools lies in the ability to disseminate content, becoming a platform par excellence for the exhibition of works (functioning as an archive), but also for obtaining feedback and creating a network.

Another interviewee, linked to theater and poetry slam, refers to the importance that the Internet played in a certain period of her creative process. In a period of reflection and discovery of a set of causes, namely feminism, but also White privilege, this artist understood that digital platforms could serve as a tool for written expression which even made it possible for her to assemble a book:

> But at the beginning of social networks, when I started writing on them, back in college, I had a blog . . . I wrote a lot and I think this generation that we live in is beautiful, that we see the transformations, kinda like unfinished texts, right? My first book has a lot in it . . . it's almost the entire blog, so there are texts that were on the blog, very few unpublished. . . . There's a lot of this construction that is very much built around networks, right? (Antónia, poet and performer, 28 years old, 2020)

Art is not limited to factors associated with individualized creative practice, but as Becker (1982) and Bourdieu (1993) have very well demonstrated, it is limited to a field where different actors maneuver and interact, possessing different roles and interests. As such, there are structures, hierarchies, and powers that operate in the arts, no different from other social fields. The processes of evaluation, ratification, and production of works, traditionally based on a closed system of institutional hierarchies, tend to be more participatory, with community members (creators, fans, audience, and so on) having a direct influence on the structuring of the field itself. This is particularly evident in fields where the digital technologies are seen as fertile platforms for the production and circulation of content, namely in fields where the boundary between the amateur and the professional is particularly tenuous (Buckingham, 2017; van Dijk, 2014).

Digital media change conventional structures, completely transforming the circulation of goods, giving greater autonomy to the creator, and providing him or her with other tools for the creation and circulation of outputs. This is a fundamental dimension mentioned by several of the interviewees. The logic of the artists' evaluation and symbolic hierarchies depends on different criteria, mechanisms, and practices. Thus, far from the selective criteria of art managed by specialists who work as gatekeepers, the Internet promotes a democratization of access and participation, generating unexpected effects, such as those described in the following excerpt, which clearly demonstrates reciprocity and circularity in the diffusion of aesthetic content.

> Above all, I get feedback from personal messages. Another very curious part of it is the fact that we are in contact with other people and that we can promote their work on our own pages. I think this is a movement for the common good, to share works by other artists with whom we identify. And then people comment and say they like it and thank you. I really appreciate this solidarity that is created within the networks. They've shared my stuff many times. (Maria, illustrator and visual artist, Illustrator/artivist, 31 years old, 2020)

Functions From an Identity and Emotional Scope

Finally, the Internet and digital platforms were also highlighted as being privileged channels for the manifestation of the self, giving rise to composite identities that articulate personal, artistic, and activist identities. This function is recurrently described as being therapeutic in nature, allowing, on the one hand, the production of artistic content as a process of self-reflection, and on the other hand, to enhance emotional connections with others. These situations are especially evident in the case of people belonging to historically subordinated and oppressed social groups who, even today, experience forms of violence and discrimination. Women, ethnic and sexual minorities, and immigrants carry these issues into the art they produce and through the Internet manage to connect with others in similar circumstances. Research has come to demonstrate that the Internet has played a relevant role in providing emotional support for these groups (Campos & Silva, 2023; Lovelock, 2017; McInroy, Zapcic, & Beer, 2022; Zimmerman, 2016).

Many of these are minority causes and, at times, clearly disruptive and threatening to the status quo, for which reason they have little visibility in the mainstream media and political agendas. Some of the interviewees reported how they turned to the field of digital media because of an imperative need to communicate or to express their anxieties or dilemmas associated with specific problems. Issues related to discrimination and ethnic and gender violence, for example, drove some of the interviewed artivists to digital media, for it was a privileged way of expressing themselves.

One of the previously cited interviewees reports how, after an episode of sexual harassment, the urge to produce and share an illustration on the subject on Instagram emerged. According to her account, and in using her own expression, this first illustration posted on Instagram was a "vomit" of sorts; a reaction to the disturbing situation she was a victim of.

Once I was on the bus on the way to Lisbon and this man came the entire trip touching my leg, which bothered and even embarrassed me. I couldn't do anything about it. So, I decided to illustrate this theme of harassment. At the time, I didn't share this image with anyone, but a friend told me that I should do it so that others could identify and to expose the situation. (Maria, illustrator and visual artist, 31 years old, 2020)

Another of our interviewees, who describes herself as an artist and an activist, produced a visual art piece that relies on illustration, comic animation, or collages. The Internet and digital tools have been very present in the work of this participant, though recently she has dedicated more of her time to the digital arts. The articulation between her art and digital platforms, however, began with a blog that she created several years back. She made it clear in her own words that the blog played an important role in her emotional balance, corresponding to a form of self-knowledge and relief in the face of situations of discrimination she felt as a Black, lesbian immigrant:

I was always looking for a way to express myself and . . . and get it out there, for the world to see what it's like to be a black lesbian woman in a postcolonial country . . . I created this blog and I wrote . . . what I did and I was always looking for causes and . . . and everything that I experienced, everything that I absorbed, for example, a situation of racism that I experienced, I would place in the blog and it was the same . . . and it was . . . at the same time, a form of escape, for I started to deal with my feelings only after all that, because I started to learn to process things instead of ignoring it all, which was not healthy; it wasn't healthy at all. It was also a form of activism. (Carla, illustrator and visual artist, 27 years old, 2020)

Conclusion

In this article, we tried to understand how digital technologies and the Internet can work in a fully integrated and symbiotic way with different forms of cultural and artistic production. We argue that these resources reinforce creative dynamics, as they not only provide new tools for creation and communication but also expand the very notion of audience. In a certain sense, it is the artivist languages and aesthetics themselves that are reconfigured within digital territories, expanding not only their intervention "stages" but also their potential audiences.

In this analysis, we have focused only on uses that are directly involved in the production and dissemination of artistic content that possess an activist intention, leaving aside uses that refer to other spheres (sociability, leisure, and so on). This particular focus on "artivism," while allowing us to circumscribe the profile of our studied population, does not resolve the problem of border ambivalence evident in various dichotomies (public/private, collective/individual, political/recreational). If, in the case of activism associated with different causes and forms of collective organization, the public and private spheres can overlap at different times, in the case of activism focused on individual creative practices, such boundaries are even more porous. The personal becomes political, largely because an individual's path is marked by episodes or circumstances that, although private, possess scopes that extend beyond the personal sphere. It should also be added that individualization stems from a certain understanding

of art as a manifestation of the subject, an emanation of a being that translates into a personal trademark composed of unique talents, techniques, and imaginary. This is particularly evident in the discourse of artivists associated with minority identity causes that we have identified. The use of certain aesthetic and creative languages associated with different digital platforms only gave expression and extended reach to concerns that go beyond the mere scope of private life. In this way, the use of digital media in artivist practices tends to reinforce (if not even create) these ambivalences, as was evident in the interviewee's discourses.

We believe that one of the central contributions of this article is precisely that of having made evident the inherent complexity of the artivist field in a particular geographical context (that of Portugal) and associated with a specific population (that of young people). These two aspects are not merely circumstantial; rather, they shape the nature and configuration of the artivist expressions analyzed. Such complexities manifest themselves through the heterogeneity of identified profiles, characterized by different attributes and objectives associated with the use of digital tools in socially and politically engaged artistic production. This diversity of profiles includes both socially and professionally recognized artists, as well as the "serious amateur" (Buckingham, 2017) or hobbyist, who possesses an artistic "vocation" of his or her own. Both find in digital media a favorable environment to express themselves, either individually or in a connected manner (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), facilitating the emergence of creative intervention modalities of a spontaneous, noninstitutional and autonomous nature, and not dependent on the regulations of the artistic and/or activist field.

It can therefore be understood that artivism ends up fulfilling different functions, this as a result of different objectives, practices, and contents produced. In general, these functions are not different from those reported by many who use digital media as an activist tool (Campos et al., 2018; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). However, the specificity of artistic contents—as well as of the artistic cultural field— implies new ways of understanding the potential represented by these devices and circuits. In many cases, the power of digital media fulfills functions that are not limited to being strictly political and of an activist nature, contributing decisively to the projection of the artist as a professional or an agent inserted in a given artistic field.

In addition to the complexity resulting from the particular modes of articulation between digital media and artistic and activist practices, it is necessary to contemplate the different spheres of intervention considered, linked to different causes. We recognize the limitation of trying to cover in the same article, activists with paths associated with different causes and spheres of action (LGBTQI+, anti-racism, climate change, and so on), which prevents us from exploring in more depth ways the specificities inherent to each of these spheres. There are certainly nuances not considered in this article that could enrich our reading of the use of digital media in different activist practices. This could be an objective to be explored in future projects with a more specific focus. However, in this case, our purpose was broader in nature and more contextual, intending to define an integrated scenario that would allow mapping the field of artivist creation through digital means, identifying its main functions in a particular territory and population.

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