How Instagram hashtags can be strategically used in politics – an analysis of #muheresnapolitica in Brazil

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Como hashtags no Instagram podem ser utilizadas estrategicamente na política – uma análise da #mulheresnapolitica no Brasil

Resumo (PT): Atualmente nas redes sociais a hashtag #mulheresnapolitica busca aumentar a atenção para o tema. As mídias sociais são cada vez mais importantes para o populismo, portanto, este artigo foca no Instagram, a mídia social com maior crescimento em 2018 e descreve como a #mulheresnapolitica é utilizada no Instagram no Brasil e como ela pode contribuir para o cenário populista no país.

A necessidade de abordar esse tema foi motivada pelo atual cenário social e político do Brasil, que carece de real antagonismo, como aponta Chantal Mouffe, com alta polarização. Para esta análise foram consideradas 259 publicações, que utilizam a #mulheresnapolitica durante o mês de outubro de 2019, um ano antes das eleições municipais do país. A novidade aqui é desejada na combinação de gênero, com populismo no contexto do Instagram. O artigo analisa o Instagram como uma rede social em ascensão para a política e explica porque as hashtags são importantes de serem analisadas também nesta rede social e os desafios apresentados para pesquisa acadêmica nesta mídia.

Palavras-chave (max. 5): Instagram, Comunicação política, hashtag, gênero.

How Instagram hashtags can be strategically used in politics – an analysis of #muheresnapolitica in Brazil

Abstract (EN): Nowadays in social media the hashtag #mulheresnapolitica, which means women in politics, seeks to increase attention to the topic. Social media are increasingly important to studies of populism, therefore, this paper focuses on Instagram, the social media with the highest growth in 2018. It describes how #mulheresnapolitica is being used on Instagram in Brazil and analyzes how it can contribute to the populist scenario in the country.

The need to address this topic was motivated by the current social and political scenario in Brazil, which lacks real antagonism and is very polarized, as Chantal Mouffe points out. For this analysis 259 publication were considered, which use the #mulheresnapolitica during October 2019, a year before the country's municipal elections. The novelty intended here is the combination of gender, populism in the context of Instagram. The paper analyzes Instagram as a rising social network in politics and explains why hashtags are important to be analyzed also in this social media, as well as the challenges presented to do academic research in this media.

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Introduction

> *"It is not possible to study society through a platform without studying the platform itself."*
> Janna Joceli Omena

Social media are embedded in several layers in the lives of thousands of people, including political life. Since the 2010s, they have been increasingly used as political tools by politicians themselves, parties, or supporters. The relevance of these new media to politics is an open field for scientific contributions. Also, this scenario is marked by the theme of women in politics in Brazilian society, which is recent and has gained more media coverage since the 1980s. These are two relevant topics for the construction of political scenarios and for political communication in the coming decades.

In the parliamentary elections[1] in Brazil, in 2018, women reached the highest representation in the National Congress. Before, 51 of the Brazilian federal deputies were women; now, there are 77 female federal deputies, which corresponds to 15% of the total number of representatives. While this advance in female representation in the Brazilian Congress is noticed, the country has been experiencing a serious democratic crisis since 2013, in which the populist discourse exerts great influence on the political scene and is a strategic feature of the current government of President Jair Bolsonaro.

This complex historical context with conflicting trends, at the same time, reflected, impacted and was made possible by the wide use of social media in Brazil and the world. Different actors use social media to express their opinions, to engage with groups to defend agendas that interest them, or simply to share information with friends about their routines, telling jokes and to having fun, thus contributing to the political landscape.

In social media, users can manifest themselves through text, images, videos, and hashtags – which are used to index topics. Hashtags can be used strategically, and people interested in a topic can choose to follow specific hashtags. This is what happens with #mulheresnapolitica, which means "women in politics" in Portuguese. Following this hashtag can also help to understand how women's political representation has been

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[1] Brazil has a direct elections system for national (federal) level and legislature (both national, state and municipal level).

discussed. In this paper, we analyze this representation in the scenario of a conflict between the struggle to defend democracy and the growth of populism in Brazil, mediated by the expansion of social media.

We aim to answer the question: how has the hashtag #mulheresnapolitica been used in the contentious context of growing populism in Brazil? To this end, we analyze the use of this hashtag by political accounts on Instagram in the 2019 municipal pre-election period in Brazil. Throughout the analysis, we focus on descriptive characteristics of posts and profiles that use the hashtag related to their contents.

For this, 259 publications of 36 different users of social media were analyzed throughout October 2019 using the filter of profiles with political activity–whether by individuals or groups of people with political roles. To refine the search, only profiles that used the hashtag at least twice were observed.

The main hypothesis we examined was that the use of the hashtag was related to a polarized setting of social media use with no space for dialogue (Mouffe, 2015). So, one of the hypothesis is that the #mulheresnapolitica hashtag is mobilized as part of a discourse used to give visibility and support for polarization. We also studied the association of this hashtag with contents that are not intended to generate in-depth debates or articulate feminist agendas and women's representation in politics.

The analysis is based primarily on the literature on polarization and social media usage, particularly Instagram. The populist discourse focuses on creating a narrative marked by a polarized idea of "us" and "them" (Akkerman, Mudde & Zaslove, 2014; Galito, 2017; Mazzoleni & Bracciale, 2018). Theory shows that social media are a tool that can serve both democratic and populist ends (de Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann & Stanyer, 2018; Hameleers, Bos & de Vreese, 2019; Mudde, 2004), as they can simultaneously generate digital engagement around political narratives and be marked by individualizing trends.

This paper will contribute to the literature that seeks to understand Instagram from a political perspective, as this was one of the fastest-growing networks in 2020, ahead of Facebook and Twitter, for example (Newman, 2020).

An overview of women in politics in Brazil will be presented, followed by a focus on Instagram in this country. By analyzing the use of #mulheresnapolitica, we aim to observe the strategies behind its use and the role of women as political protagonists, also in association with other hashtags.

1. Polarized but networked: a brief tour of the history of populist communication in Brazil

The impeachment of President Dilma Rousseff in 2016 is a symbolic mark of the political polarization that took hold in Brazil, dividing society between us against them (Pinheiro-Machado, 2019). This paper does not address the causes of polarization or populism itself, but rather the use and capitalization that is made on top of polarization by populist communication.

Populist communication is understood as the strategic use made mainly by politicians to increase political antagonism, leaving little or no space for plural thinking (Mazzoleni, 2008; Mouffe, 2015; Mudde, 2016). Currently, populist messages are amplified by digital media, especially social media (de Vreese et al., 2018; Esser & Hopmann, 2016; Figueiras, 2020).

After the impeachment, the 2018 presidential elections that brought right-wing populist Jair Bolsonaro to power (Mudde, 2020; Pinheiro-Machado, 2019) were also marked by a significant increase in the number of women elected to the federal legislature. Before, 51 of the Brazilian federal deputies were women; now, there are 77 female federal deputies, which corresponds to 15% of the total number of representatives (Senado Federal, 2019).

However, despite the rise in the absolute number of women elected, there is an increase in the conservative agenda and a political polarization in the Brazilian Congress. A year after the 2018 elections, federal deputy Carla Zambelli, from the right-wing party that elected Bolsonaro, the Social Liberal Party (PSL), said she was to blame for this polarization: "I myself am to blame for the polarization. We don't do it with the intention of polarizing or reaching the end of the rope. […] But there is actually a very big polarization, and a lot of

fighting amongst ourselves"[2] (Mota, Sardinha & Calixto, 2019). Polarization affects women themselves in politics.

Polarization is present in various aspects of politics and is one of the pillars for the growth and maintenance of populist politicians (Mouffe, 2015). The polarization in digital media reflects political polarization. This "us against them" dynamic is what matters for this study, especially in neoliberal societies, where there is greater individuality and less space for collective solutions encompassing the pluralities and complexities inherent in societies (Fuchs, 2020; Han, 2018).

The polarization in social media is linked to the limitation of people's interaction with digital bubbles (Pariser, 2012).[3] This implies interacting almost exclusively with individuals and themes that agree with the viewpoints and interests of each user, for filtering mechanisms remove what is different. Nevertheless, it is still possible to use social media to mobilize and stimulate debate and criticism. The combination of neoliberal system and digital bubbles, however, can contribute to a more individualized society (Chomsky, 2015; Flusser, 2012; Fuchs, 2016).

The antagonistic scenario can be perceived on social media and, we believe, through the strategic use of posts with hashtags[4], for example. Hashtags allow individuals to follow topics of their interest. We aim to analyze the use of #mulheresnapolitica in Brazil, its growth and its party and ideological associations. Also, we intend to observe its strategic use and relation to polarization.

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[2] "Eu mesmo tenho culpa da polarização. A gente não faz com a intenção de polarizar ou de esticar a corda. … Mas há realmente uma polarização muito grande. E muita briga entre nós mesmos."

[3] Digital bubbles, bubble filters, or filter bubbles, as Eli Pariser (2012) called them, are filtering mechanisms that create a world of their own for individuals, with exclusive news and information. These mechanisms are not impartial and, as Pariser points out, they fit each person's worldview. Thus, news, updates on social networks and advertisement are a reflection of the bubble in which everyone lives, without much space to see the other's point of view.

[4] Hashtags are tags used to facilitate the search for topics on social networks. They are composed of the symbol # followed by a word or key, for instance, #mulheresnapolitica. This concept and its strategic use will be deepened later in this paper.

2. From suffrage to the political polarization of women's agenda in politics

In Brazil, women are underrepresented in all political categories. They hold less than 15% of seats in the National Congress, 4% of seats in ministries and state government positions, and 12% of the positions of mayor. This places the country as the worst in Latin America in terms of the inclusion of women in the public sphere (Entidad de las Naciones Unidas para la Igualdad de Género y el Empoderamiento de las Mujeres (ONU Mujeres), 2017; Senado Federal, 2019). Current data reflect the history of elections in the country. Since the 16th century, there have been elections and votes in Brazil, but only in the 20th century, did women have the right to suffrage (Cajado et al., 2014). The history of women in politics is marked by the struggle for recognition.

At the end of the 19th century, women's restlessness contesting and claiming the vote became striking and more documented in Brazil. One of the most emblematic newspapers in the history of women's suffrage was *A Família*, written by educator Josefina Álvares de Azevedo, from the Pernambuco state, and launched in 1888. The newspapers were a means of opposing the status quo at the time (Cajado et al., 2014). Josefina later published the play *O Voto Feminino*, in 1890, but it was only half a century later that women's suffrage was achieved in Brazil (Maior, 2004).

For centuries, bills, speeches, and behind-the-scenes politics were made to achieve women's right to vote. To draw parallels with this study, it is important to know that the exchange of ideas and formation of social networks in that century occurred mainly through newspapers, theater plays, literature, pamphlets, and face-to-face meetings. As Teresa Cristina Marques (2018) reports, in the 1920s, unable to vote and to be elected, women were not seen as full citizens.

It was only in 1932 that women achieved the right to vote and began to be seen as individuals: "that was the result of the actions of feminists, sectors of the Catholic clergy, intellectuals, and politicians" (Cajado et al., 2014, p. 73). It must be noted that voters

started to be seen as unique beings, as individuals, something that still makes an impact nowadays.

In 2010, Dilma Rousseff had been elected Brazil's first female president (Cajado et al., 2014). She was re-elected in 2014 and impeached in 2016. As we mentioned before, in the parliamentary elections in Brazil, in 2018, a significant increase in women's representation in the Lower Chamber was achieved.

This small advance brings about changes in legislative regulations that seek to make female representation effective. Among the most relevant legal frameworks in this regard is the Law of Quotas (Law 9,100/1995), whose effectiveness is still questionable (Senado Federal, 2019).

The difficulty to ensure the representation of women in politics through legal frameworks highlights the real challenge, which is to provide the conditions to increase female participation in politics. Furthermore, talking about female representation does not imply that the feminist agenda will be defended. This is clear in the antagonistic positions of the women currently holding seats in the Brazilian National Congress.

Considering that "the political discussion is definitely embedded in the new technological means"[5] (Cajado et al., 2014, p. 65), we will analyze how publication on Instagram relate to the protagonism of women in politics. Before moving on to this analysis, we will approach populist communication in Brazil to highlight the relevance of the media in populist politics.

3. Populist communication in Brazil goes hand in hand with technological disruptions

At present, the first signs of the arrival of this populist *zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004) in Brazil were the protests that emerged in Europe in 2011 (Pinheiro-Machado, 2019). Those anti-

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[5] "A discussão política está definitivamente embrenhada aos novos meios tecnológicos".

austerity protests were only possible in several countries because of the advanced stage of the internet. However, after a few years, there was a transformation in the use of internet media, filtering their interactions (Pariser, 2012). Mobilizations such as Occupy Wall Street were only possible because at that time users of social media were not yet limited to digital bubbles (Pariser, 2012; Pinheiro-Machado, 2019).

We believe the use of social media can contribute to reinforcing a polarized scenario, especially because it is aligned with neoliberal values. These values strengthen individualization and stimulate individuals to consume news, information and politics like any other product (Chomsky, 2015; Fuchs, 2016) on social media, leaving little room for criticism.

3.1 Populist communication: contextualizing populism

Understanding the phenomenon of populism requires being aware of its context and historical trajectory. Populism does not have a single definition or concept (Waisbord, 2013). In this paper populist communication is understood as a political-communicational phenomenon, whose characteristics are noted in rhetoric, in certain context, and in politicians' speech. It refuses plurality and is based on affective-polarization (Barberá, 2020) – by not liking the other, it does not acknowledge others existence and rights.

The cultural context influences the populist ideology, for example, if the politician is opposed to globalization, immigrants, elites or the gender agenda; and also because populism is always supported by other ideologies, such as socialism, neoliberalism, or the extreme right (Akkerman et al., 2014; Mudde, 2016).

It is not our intention to deepen the discussion on the concept of populism but to focus on one of its outstanding characteristics, which is the eminent polarization, fueled by populism and dependent on it. Populist characteristics can vary depending on the cultural context and its association with either a left or right ideology. Although leftist populism is more observed in Latin America (Mouffe, 2015), in Brazil the most prominent and studied

populist leaders are from the right (Bethell, 2018; Moura & Corbellini, 2019; Waisbord, 2013). They all have in common the maintenance of the polarized scenario.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of populism can be understood from various perspectives and areas of knowledge. Here, the focus is on populist communication—the one used mainly by politicians, who depend on digital media to spread their messages (Blassnig, Ernst, Büchel, Engesser & Esser, 2019; de Vreese et al., 2018).

We believe that using social media strategically can equally contribute to social polarization (Cesarino, 2020) and to the maintenance of a populist scenario, especially a scenario without much room for critical debate.

Among populist politicians, some relevant differences in communication are observed in the contemporary Western context. A predominant influence in the mass media networks stands out, amplifying populist rhetoric especially through the use of social media (de Vreese et al., 2018; Wodak, 2015), such as Twitter, Facebook and, most recently, Instagram.

Here we will analyze Instagram, specifically concerning the polarization of women in politics, as previously explained.

4. Instagram—the social network on the rise also in politics

The sky is orange, with shades of lilac. The sun says goodbye to the day as if diving into the sea. Contemplating the most beautiful sunset ever seen, someone decides to capture the moment. One click and one post. What used to take days or months to be revealed after the click became instant in the post: all the person's followers on Instagram saw a little of what the person saw, know where the person was, and what the person 'likes'. What started with the seemingly simple idea of posting photos to share with acquaintances and people who like the same topics, has become influential and powerful social media. It is a daily transformation—and growth.

Social media were designed primarily for the self-promotion of its users, both personal and institutional, to communicate with their peers and interested parties, either in text or image. Instagram, like other social media, ends up reflecting the decisions of particular groups and societies, and their own and political interests (Wajcman, 2015).

According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report (2020), people are spending less time on Facebook and more on Instagram, including use for news—a 30% increase in use for news in Brazil. Since 2018, usage of Instagram as a news source has doubled and is set to surpass Twitter (Newman, 2020). The sunset shares space with political discussions in a network designed for images.

Political accounts, while not as popular as those of entertainment and sports personalities, have millions of followers. Politics is in digital networks, and the polarization can be seen in the accounts of public and political figures, in comments and in the use of hashtags.

As previously exposed, in general, social media are not widely used spaces for criticism and debate. Nevertheless, as Tim Highfield points out (2016), there is a strong interconnection between private and political affairs. That is, even though politics is not the main theme, an Instagram post can become political when engaged with a certain topic.

For example, the posting of a photo of a tree made by model and activist Gisele Bündchen achieves a political commitment for the protection of the Amazon and against the increase in illegal fires. Digital networks challenge and expand the reach of the mass media, and the broad debates initiated in the mass media shape social media discussions (Jansson, 2015).

Therefore, observing this universe in the daily lives of public and political figures, outside the campaign season, makes it possible to better understand how these individuals interpret and interact with politics in a space that is not designed for promoting debate. It is important to know what social media are and what differentiates Instagram from other media and channels to finally understand why it is relevant to study it.

4.1 Basic concepts: social media, Instagram and hashtag

Social media are contemporary phenomena. They are built in virtual space and capable of reflecting and transforming the individual and their construction of reality. Social media are digital, based on website services or applications, and accessed by digital means, such as computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

Interaction through social media produces metadata and users do not realize that their metadata can be used for trade. According Shoshana Zuboff (2020), this new type of data trade is used to ensure positive behavior for commercial results. In other words, it is a new economic system that is only possible in the digital environment, which is based on metadata generated by users and which is capable of revealing human behavior, Zuboff calls it surveillance capitalism.

Regardless of the usage of their metadata, users utilize social media to build contacts between acquaintances and strangers who share interests and connections, as presented by Danah M. Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison (2007). For these authors, what makes this type of media unique is not only its ability to connect acquaintances and strangers but, above all, the possibility of seeing each other's connections and 'friends'. This is reflected in the individual's desire to belong to certain groups and feel recognized (Jansson, 2015).

Instagram was launched in October 2010 as an online social media for sharing images and photos in square format. In 2012, Instagram was purchased by the Facebook group. According to the app's official website (Instagram, 2020), Instagram is designed to bring "you closer to the people and things you love". The individual who uses this tool is called Instagrammer by the company.

The evolution of Instagram features has allowed videos, photos and images to be shared in different formats, as well as ephemeral videos and photos (stories), direct messages, longer videos (Instagram Television, or IGTV), and purchases (Hu et al., 2014). The study of this digital network clarifies how individuals, the Instagrammers, document their daily lives.

According to Tim Highfield and Tama Leaver (2014), this documentation takes place in a predominantly visual context. However, in addition to the image or video published, it is

possible to search and connect to topics, groups and themes through related or unrelated caption using a hashtag, which is composed of the symbol # accompanied by a word, phrase or text.

According to András Benedek and Ágnes Veszelszki (2016), a hashtag is a type of tag used in social media to facilitate the search for a topic or theme by metadata. Though its use was popularized in the digital social network Twitter, currently it has surpassed social media and is also used on television and even in verbal exchanges.

The use of a hashtag depends on the context and the individual. It can be mobilized as a policy framework strategy for certain discussions. The literature on digital activism highlights the role of the use of hashtags for engagement around agendas, as they build meanings about facts and events (Benford & Snow, 2000), simplify and group aspects of the world (Nunes, 1993), and create bridges and collective identities in a dynamic process.

At the same time, such use cannot always be associated with a conscious desire to join a specific group (Highfield, 2016; Highfield & Leaver, 2014). It can be said that it is more related to the desire to expand one's relationship with a topic or area. The authors, however, suggest that caution is needed when searching for photos by using hashtags, as, for them, this is probably done by researchers rather than individuals: "we must keep in mind that while we can, and do, access Instagram photos using hashtags as a means of organization, in many cases this affordance is likely to be more the focus of researchers, not individual users" (Highfield, 2016, online).

Despite the authors' suggestion, according to the official Instagram website, the use of the application is also recommended for those who want to "expand their business". It states that "people use Instagram to get inspiration and discover things that interest them, including content from brands and companies", and the hashtag is a way to access that content (Instagram, 2020).

In the guidelines to set up a business account, the possibility for obtaining real-time metrics about the performance of posts, information about the followers and how they interact is

highlighted. There is a section that explains how to get discovered on Instagram using a hashtag. The guidelines propose the use of a variety of hashtags on the posts and suggest that this will make it possible to reach more people in 4 days.

In 2019, the company suggested nine categories of hashtags for business (Instagram, 2019):

Table 1: Hashtag categories suggested by Instagram

Types of hashtag	Examples given by Instagram
Hashtags indicating your product or service	#sweater or #coffeeshop
Hashtags indicating your niche in your industry	#weddingphotographer or #travelphotographer
Hashtags for Instagram communities in your industry	#bakersofinstagram or #foodiesofinstagram
Hashtags for special events or seasons	#whiteday or #nationaldonutday
Hashtags using location	#pastelariasp, #madeinRecife or #doceriadorio
Daily hashtags	#mondaymotivation, #tuesdaytip, or #wellnesswednesday
Hashtags with phrases relevant to what you do	#becreative or #bakerylove
Hashtags with acronyms	#qotd (quote of the day) or #ootd (outfit of the day)
Hashtags with emojis	#shoes⬜ or #⬜

Author: Catharina Vale, 2020, based on information from the official Instagram website.

Image 1: Instagram page on the use of hashtags, 2019

Instagram allows the creation of personal or professional/business accounts. Instagram business categories comprise the following: automotive, B2B, consumer goods, e-commerce, education, entertainment and media, financial services, games, healthcare and pharmacy, NGO, professional services, restaurants, retail, sports, technology, telecommunications, travel (Instagram, 2019). No information is given on the company's website on how to address politics as a topic or how to manage accounts of public figures. Instead, business metrics are provided for people to turn their private accounts into business.

Following the logic of Instagram, #mulheresnapolitica can be understood in the category "phrases relevant to what you do". It will be analyzed later in relation to other categories to assess its growth and its party and ideological associations. The use of hashtags for thematic campaigns is itself a social reflection of the importance given to the most discussed topics on Twitter (Highfield, 2016) and other social media, the so-called trend topics. On the other hand, campaigns are usually a way of advocating for an ideal, an objective.

5. Methodology: digital, quantitative and analytical methods

For this paper, the analysis of hashtags on social media involved digital methods in the study design. Thus, it was necessary to consider the infrastructure of Instagram itself, the platform in question, the search engines, which are limited in this social media, as well as their relevance in the contemporary sociopolitical context (Venturini & Latour, 2019).

For the identification of the data itself we considered the format of Instagram. The means data could be extracted were considered, accepting the challenge of manual collection. To encourage future research, it is important that data can be made available in an open way, with the intention of facilitate its reuse (Venturini & Latour, 2019), mainly because Instagram is a network that is still little researched.

We analyzed the use of #mulheresnapolitica on Instagram, a digital social media that focuses on image sharing, but that offers many more elements that communicate, such as text and hashtags. We intended to question the use of this hashtag to characterize a populist landscape and the protagonist role of women in politics. The starting question was: how has the hashtag #mulheresnapolitica been used in the contentious context of growing populism in Brazil?

The main hypothesis was that the use of this hashtag was related to a polarized setting of social media use with no space for dialogue. The #mulheresnapolitica hashtag is mobilized as part of a discourse used to give visibility and support for populism. We also studied the association of this hashtag with contents that are not intended to generate in-depth debates or articulate feminist agendas and women's representation in politics.

To select posts for analysis, only open and public publications were considered, following the privacy policy of Facebook and Instagram in force in October 2019. As this is not a Big Data analysis, we recognize it does not represent the entire online universe of this network; however, it does represent an outline of the use of the network by Instagrammers whose

accounts were public and who matched the features and filters proposed to answer the research question in the period analyzed.

It is noteworthy that the spelling is important to search for hashtags, as well as the use or not of graphic signs or emojis. Thus, the spelling is #mulheresnapolitica, although in Portuguese the word *política* is written with an accent mark.

Since it was impossible to use data collection software, this was done manually. The Instagram Application Programming Interface (API)[6] restrictions do not allow the retrieval of historical data, as it is allowed in networks such as Twitter, for example. In practice, companies that use hashtag monitoring software do not issue reports with profiles of hashtag usage but allow the monitoring of metrics, that is, the quantitative view of usage. The Instagram network makes the data publicly available neither for companies nor for research, which can be a problem for scientific and historical record purposes.

The researchers accessed Instagram from the computer using their private profiles. Although private accounts were used, search results are not affected by search algorithms. Hashtag searches, however, only respond to one piece of information. Automatic cross-checking of data is not possible, for example, #mulheresnapolitica during the year 2019, or within a range of months. The search is organic and this difficulty to correlate information makes the search more complex and can, as happened during this research, lead to a temporary lock on the account if Instagram understands that there is "suspicious activity". Another form of research is monitoring specific profiles, but this was not the purpose of this study.

Image 2:

Search for #mulheresnapolitica on Instagram

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[6] These are a series of commands that allow users and applications to communicate with websites and request data hosted on their servers. Academic apps and some full-featured software are nothing more than interfaces that connect to APIs and facilitate the data collection process (Silva & Stabile, 2016).

On April 30, 2019, the search retrieved 41,185 publications with #mulheresnapolitica

We decided to analyze the month of October 2019 because it was outside the electoral period and because that choice would allow us to collect data 12 months before the municipal elections. After the pandemic caused by Covid-19, the voting period was postponed from October to November 2020.

We collected 840 posts manually, of which 259 were selected for initial analysis. This first selection considered only posts that had a direct textual or image relationship with political parties or figures. The following were discarded: product sales posts (for example, women's lingerie sales), non-Brazilian accounts, accounts from private companies, movie promotions, reposts, and personal profiles that mentioned a political activity, but used only one hashtag (#mulheresnapolitica), as we aimed to observe how #mulheresnapolitica related to other hashtags. Profiles with a single post using #mulheresnapolitica during the period observed were also discarded.

Image 3:
Examples of images retrieved in the search. Some posts were selected, others discarded
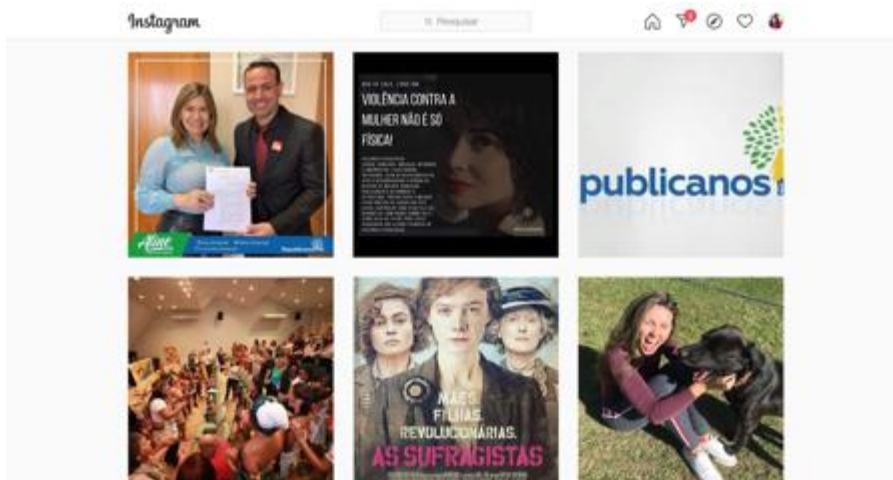
5.1 Description of the digital data obtained

A total of 259 posts from 36 accounts were analyzed. They used #mulheresnapolitica in combination with other hashtags that were analyzed according to five of the nine categories suggested by Instagram. The five categories were chosen due to their alignment with the political theme. Furthermore, we examined caption, image, profile, and how these aspects related to political polarization.

Publications were categorized according to type of profile; political office; gender of the profile; how women are represented in the image and caption of the publication; party or institutional affiliation; analysis by type of associated hashtags; association with the agenda for women in politics; geographic location (state of Brazil); contribution to the strengthening of the polarized discourse in Brazil.

The data collected show that the hashtag was used mainly by users with a political profile, such as deputies, councilors, and senators (192). The other publications were from users with a personal profile (26), political parties (25), party association (2), as well as NGOs, campaigns, and political schools (14).

Of the 192 publications with political profiles, 75 were made by councilors, 104 by state deputies, and 3 by federal deputies. No posts were made by profiles of senators or ministers. Finally, there were four posts by presidents of political parties and six posts by candidates, whose positions were not mentioned.

It is important to highlight the predominance of female profiles using the hashtag #womeninpolitics. Out of the 259 posts, 250 were made by women; 4 belonged to profiles of men, and 5 were not defined.
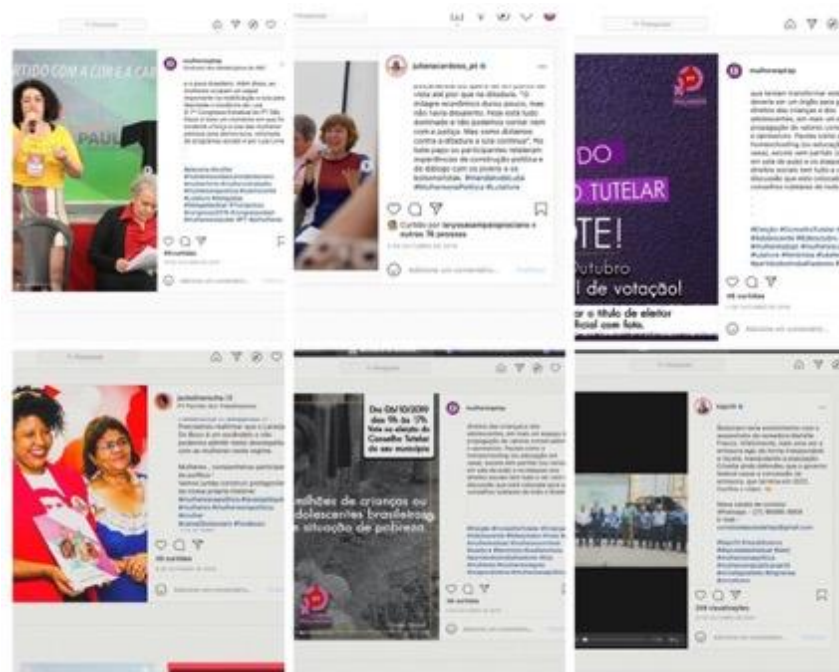
The item 'association with the agenda for women in politics' aims to assess whether the posts that use #mulheresnapolitica, which is composed of "phrases relevant to what you do", are associated with the importance of women playing an active role in politics. We identified 47 posts that reinforce the active role of women in politics.

Hashtags are commonly used together, associating different types of hashtags. We found 24 posts that used only one type of hashtag associated with #mulheresnapolitica, and 241 had in common the use of hashtags belonging to the category "phrases relevant to what you do".

The geographic locations of the posts were also identified. In this study, the posts were from 14 states and the Federal District. The five regions of Brazil were represented by these states. As for polarization, only 7 of the 259 posts contained a caption whose discourse was considered polarized.

Image 4:

Six of the seven posts whose caption contributes to the polarized discourse—they are all from the left party, except for one


5.2 Analysis of the results

The association with the agenda for women in politics, in this case, does not reinforce the role of women, as the posts approach different themes, regardless of gender. The result of 212 posts suggests that the use of #mulheresnapolitica does not relate women's political participation, even though this is a relevant phrase.

Though #mulheresnapolitica belongs to the category "phrases relevant to what you do", according to Instagram's classification, we observed that this hashtag is used in the sample analyzed not to promote women's political participation, but to draw attention to several topics regarding politics, but regardless of the content of the posts. Associating politics to banal topics is a strategy itself, as Tim Highfield suggests (2016), it can be seen as a communicational context. Similar to the usage of hashtags in Twitter, Instagram also responds to users behavior involving encouraging political and social topics.

Image 5:

Posts that use #mulheresnapolitica promote different topics, but do not necessarily talk about the actual participation of women in politics
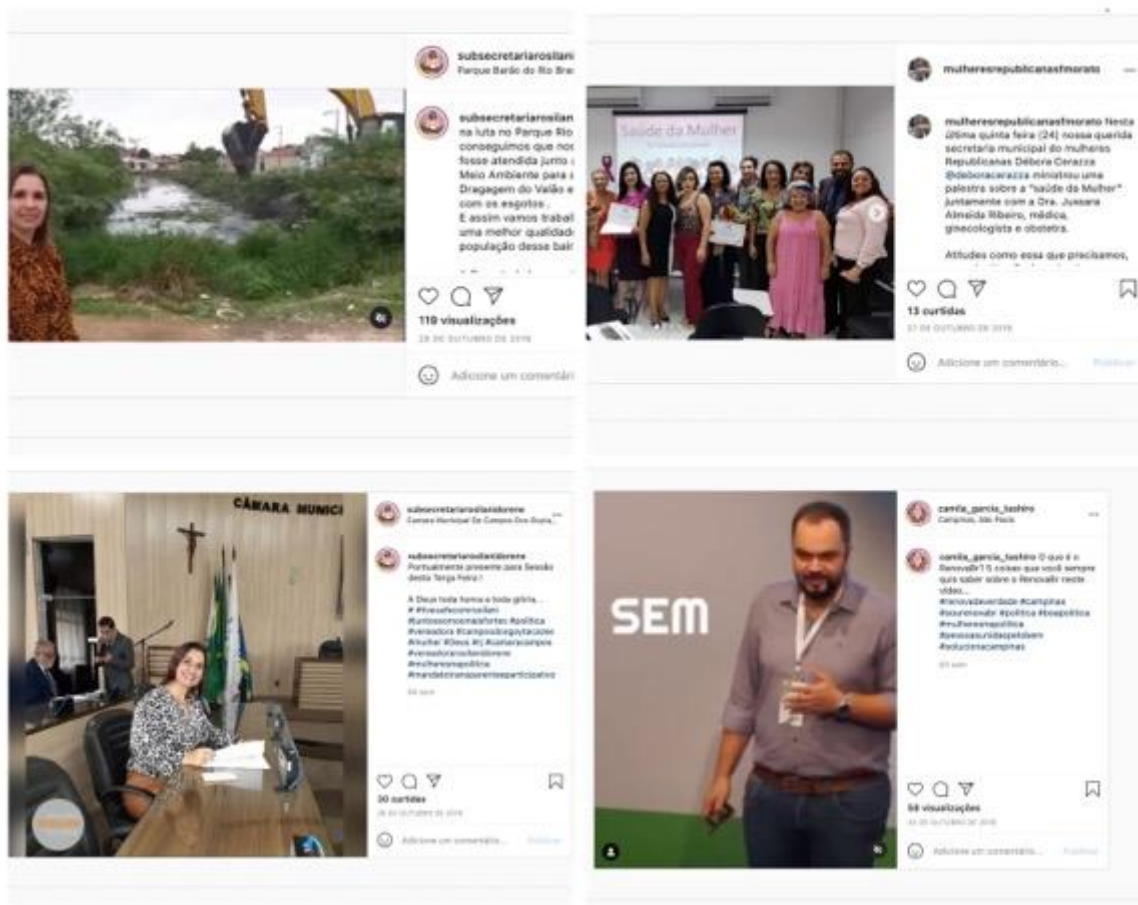
Hashtags are commonly used together, and different categories of hashtags are associated. This association might figure empty meaning as it happens in Twitter (Cesarino, 2020), commonly to promote an emerging or trend topic. According to Instagram, this is a strategy to attract more users. In this study, the 241 posts that use hashtags categorized as "phrases relevant to what you do" are a kind of *statement*, beyond the caption and the image.

Taking into account that Brazil is a large country, geographic location is a pertinent piece of information, especially for political purposes. Most of the posts are about politicians

aimed at a specific state.[7] Brazil has 26 states and a Federal District. Of these, 14 states and the Federal District were identified in the posts, representing the five regions of the country.

Although the use of #mulheresnapolitica does not characterize political polarization—only eight posts suggested polarization—, one fact has called our attention. Of the 259 posts analyzed, 147 were from two accounts: @tiaju10 with 81 posts, from the Republicanos party, and @vereadorarosilanidorene with 66 posts, which did not mention any party. Together, these two accounts were responsible for 56.75% of the posts. That is, more than half of the posts are linked to two overtly conservative accounts. Since this study does not intend to analyze profiles, but hashtag associations, this is considered an important finding.

As mentioned, the two accounts responsible for the highest number of publications belong to admittedly more conservative women, which did not present their party filiation. This is also a reflex of populist communication, shifting the focus to a particular message and "no longer on a particular party family or type of politician" (de Vreese et al., 2018, p. 425). Of the 147 posts, only two have captions related to the role of women in politics. Both posts are from Tia Ju's profile and are described below.

The post on the 24th of October addressed Bill No. 3528-A/2017, on the institution of the Statute of Women in Parliament and Occupants of Public Offices or Posts: "Nowadays, it is increasingly common to see women holding public offices and positions of power, but, unfortunately, prejudice and harassment are more common than we think."[8] In the post on the 29th, about a symposium on the importance of women in parliament, the caption reads: "Women have been conquering their space, but there is still little representation in the spaces of power and, mainly, in the Legislative Houses."[9]

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[7] Councilors and state deputies are positions chosen in regional elections (by municipality or state).

[8] "Hoje em dia, é cada vez mais comum vermos mulheres ocupando cargos públicos e posições de poder, mas, infelizmente, o preconceito e o assédio é mais comum do que imaginamos."

[9] "A mulher vem conquistando o seu espaço, mas ainda há pouca representatividade nos espaços de poder e, principalmente, nas Casas Legislativas."

Image 6:

Posts from the account that has the highest number of publications with #mulheresnapolitica. Of the 147 posts, only two address the role of women in politics. October 24th and 29th, 2019.

Both posts use #mulheresnapolitica combined with "phrases relevant to what you do" hashtags, and no other categories. As Tim Highfield argues (2016), hashtags campaign and activism are a practice of collective actions part of the social media rituals, however, what

we notice in this analysis is that there is no collective realization in the usage of #mulheresnapolitica. Having a collective proposal is difficult to be achieved in a polarized society.

Conclusion

The social media tool that started with a purpose to bring its Instagrammers closer to the people and things they love now strives to empower businesses to reach consumers, who are immersed in their digital bubbles.

Noticeably, the use of hashtags is designed not only for the individual organization or research but also as something strategic. To answer the main question, "how has the hashtag #mulheresnapolitica been used in the contentious context of growing populism in Brazil?", it can be inferred from the data analyzed that, although there is no clear contribution to polarization, the excessive use of the hashtag by two accounts may be an indicator of strategic use to dominate the arena with a theme that should serve all women. A possible reflection of the lack of collective realization.

The main hypothesis, which related the use of the hashtag to a polarized setting of social media usage with no space for dialogue, did not prove valid. The use of #mulheresnapolitica as part of a speech to give visibility and express support for populism was observed in the captions of only seven posts, of which six were from an openly left-wing party, seen by President Jair Bolsonaro as the "others", the enemy of his government.

On the other hand, the Instagrammer who follows #mulheresnapolitica to keep themselves informed of the developments of women in politics in Brazil receives information and updates from multiple profiles. Without much information, one can get the impression that women in politics is a topic more addressed by a particular party, or that it is developed not to promote the inclusion of women in the public sphere, but simply to address generic issues somehow associated with the feminine.

At this point, the 147 posts stand out, corresponding to 56.75% of the total, divided into two profiles. This may overshadow the setting in the sample analyzed and be perceived as if more conservative parties were dominating the agenda of women in politics. The excesses of posts are from Tia Ju (@tiaju10) of Republicanos and Rosilani do Renê (@vereadorarosilanidorene), who does not mention her party affiliation in her social media but is from the Christian Social Party (PSC). Both are conservative parties in coalition with the current populist government of Jair Bolsonaro—who has been without party affiliation since November 2019.

This finding is in line with the trend observed in the Brazilian Congress: more women elected, in absolute numbers, but also an increase in the conservative agenda. Furthermore, women's suffrage in Brazil guaranteed their right to vote, but not the recognition of their collective identity in politics.

From what we saw in the analysis of sample data of #mulheresnapolitica on Instagram, we cannot infer that this hashtag is being used to generate political antagonism. At the same time, it is not possible to conclude that the way the media was used deflates the debate or generates a polarized conflict in the context of growing populism.

 On Instagram, metrics generated by hashtags and interactions follow a business logic. The creation of political or organizational profile accounts is not planned on Instagram. In other words, it is possible to reflect on the presence of political actors on this social media from a neoliberal commercial logic, which privileges not content, but metrics and reach, and the commercialization of metadata–in line with the logics of the surveillance capitalism. This can make it difficult to reach those politicians who are just starting out and who need to be found, often through a hashtag.

In the past, newspapers and magazines were used by women to oppose the *status quo* and claim the right to vote. Today, women have a platform with a different logic to make their rights heard. We hope this work can inspire new strategic and political research on Instagram, to mature methodologies for mining data for analysis (as there is no API for

doing so), and, most importantly, to answer further questions and provocations that arise from the data and the preliminary conclusions brought by this study.

We conclude these reflections with new concerns: after all, who actually searches for hashtags? Would it be researchers and individuals who create their own hashtags to find photos they like more easily, as suggested by Highfield, or is it possible to say that hashtags are used consciously, based on metadata? Businesses, companies, politicians, and parties use hashtags strategically to increase their visibility, influence, and reach, but do Instagrammers realize this and how does it affect them?

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