

Activisms in times of crisis: Theoretical and methodological contributions from communication studies

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Activisms emerge in different ways to advance visions and actions aimed at transforming the social order. Social movement studies suggest that they make it possible to identify moments of crisis, disagreement, and conflict, in which competing visions of the future are contested.

Communication is a key field for addressing the symbolic and performative dimensions of activism. For years, research has shown that communicative processes are central to the construction of political subjects and their public positioning. Media and digital technologies are not merely instrumental tools; rather, they form part of a broader network in which meaning itself is contested (Flores-Márquez, 2019; Medrado & Rega, 2023; Milan & Beraldo, 2024; Saavedra, 2021; Suzina, 2024; Treré, 2019).

When we think about activism in times of crisis, we inevitably confront a series of questions regarding how collective struggles are configured, communicated, and transformed in contexts marked by democratic

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instability and the changing nature of public spheres. Although mobilizations emerge in these contexts, they do not always do so in the same way. In this sense, even where elements of continuity exist, contemporary activism differs from those of 1968, the emergence of the Zapatista Movement, or the post-2010 movements that spread globally.

Over the past fifteen years, we have witnessed advances in rights and social participation, but we have also seen the resurgence of conservatism and democratic setbacks in many of the same countries and elsewhere. From this context emerged our interest in mobilizations that contribute to the protection, defense, strengthening, and projection of democracy.

This thematic section is situated at the intersection of communication studies and social movements research. We propose an updated perspective that begins from the tensions and challenges shaping the field since the global cycle of mobilizations that started in the 2010s and continues to the present day. Along this trajectory, questions arise concerning phenomena such as the resurgence of authoritarianism, increasing polarization, transformations in forms of collective action, and the contradictory role of digital platforms and their algorithmic logics. Through six articles, we explore forms of activism that lie beyond the usual perspectives adopted in communication and social movement studies.

The article “Communicative hegemony and counter-hegemony in the 2024 Barcelona America’s Cup”, co-authored by Joan Pedro Carañana and Toby Miller, examines local responses to global sporting events. The case of the 2024 Barcelona America’s Cup highlights local resistance to a corporate-state narrative that promotes such spectacles as inherently beneficial for national and urban development. The authors approach resistance through organized citizenship and the construction of a counter-hegemonic discourse at narrative, symbolic, and performative levels. In doing so, the article contributes to understanding the dynamics of a dissident narrative expressed through bodies, texts, and social media networks, generating meaning from the issues that most directly shape everyday life.

“Communicative micropolitics and neighborhood activism in urban crises: the cases of General Lacy 22 and Puebla 261”, by Ramiro

Díaz-Maroto Oro, invites us to consider the neighborhood as a space of both material and symbolic contestation, as well as affective relations that collectively define and transform territory through continuous movement. Within this dynamic emerge communicative micropolitics that, in both Madrid and Mexico City, and by extension in cities across the world, shape the common sense of place, make it possible to identify crises threatening the territory, and nurture collective efforts to confront them, namely neighborhood activism. This process transforms the individual right to inhabit a place into a collective struggle and a set of practices of mutual care.

For their part, Susana Cruzalta Granados and André Dorcé Ramos, in “The reconfiguration of networks of alterity: anti-racist activisms and sociodigital mediations in Mexico”, analyze the ways in which a crisis, in this case the COVID-19 pandemic, triggered transformations in anti-racist activism in Mexico within syndemic contexts. These transformations include increased visibility on digital platforms, stronger connections among activists and collectives both online and offline, and efforts to influence public policy through collective proposals aimed at combating discrimination.

Sebastián Rivera Arancibia’s article contributes to reflections on the dimensions through which mobilization operates communicatively. Moving beyond media-centric or digital-centric perspectives, it highlights the importance of encounters, occupation, and co-presence as practices that, in conjunction with digital communication, are fundamental to the construction of civic identity and meaning. Titled “One foot in the streets and the other on Facebook: Digital constructions of popular identity”, the article opens avenues for exploring the diverse communicative spaces through which popular mobilization emerges and consolidates.

In “From arrow to algorithm: communication dynamics within the indigenous movement of the Brazilian Amazon in the 21st century”, Vilso Junior Santi offers a systematic review of empirical studies on the evolution of Indigenous communication in Brazil, tracing a path between community-based and artisanal communication practices and the incorporation of digital technologies. This work allows us to observe transformations in both the phenomena themselves and the

analytical approaches used to study them, while also advancing the concept of Indigenous ethnocommunication. Santi acknowledges the conceptual limitations of this term and employs it in relation to the *retomadas* movement among Indigenous peoples in Brazil. This movement refers to processes of reclaiming territories originally inhabited by Indigenous communities and underscores the need to link territorial reclaiming with symbolic reclaiming.

Finally, María Soledad Segura focuses on silence in the article “Is more communication always better communication? From silencing to strategic silence in Latin American social movements”. Her work contributes to discussions of less visible, yet no less effective, forms of activism through the concept of *strategic silence* in communication. Drawing on the experiences of activists in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, and Colombia, she also offers insights regarding temporality, showing how practices of strategic silence have been developed over many years and under diverse circumstances.

Together, these contributions expand the conceptual boundaries of research and reveal underexplored areas in the study of the relationship between media, communication, and social movements. They do so through a fresh, critical, and contemporary perspective largely grounded in the Global South. The section thus offers new insights for rethinking the relationship between communication and democracy by foregrounding communicative practices that contest meaning, build community, and sustain forms of resistance in adverse contexts.

These articles also engage in dialogue with thematic sections previously published in this journal. We refer first to “Technopolitics and digital citizenship”, edited by Salvador Leetoy, Diego Zavala-Scherer, and Francisco Sierra (2019), which examined the communicative potential of digital platforms in struggles and forms of resistance related to human rights, territory, and social justice among Indigenous community communicators, feminists, searching families, journalists, migrants, and others. We also refer to “Collaborative knowledge practices and social movements. Technologies and free and citizen media for the production of common goods”, edited by Dafne Calvo and Alejandro Barranquero (2022), which focused on activist communication as a pedagogical and cultural process, emphasizing collective

learning, collaborative practices on digital platforms, and the role of technological infrastructures and self-managed media in the pursuit of technological sovereignty.

Our thematic section contributes additional elements to these discussions while leaving several questions open. Among its contributions is a reflection on the relationship between activism and the sociohistorical contexts from which it emerges. Although we are no longer witnessing global movements mobilizing massive crowds in the streets, we do observe a growing revaluation of the local and of initiatives aimed at sustaining community ties on a micro scale. This tendency appears in several of the articles included here and was also evident among other manuscripts submitted for consideration but ultimately not published. Collectively, these contributions shed light on emerging forms of activism and underscore the importance of paying closer analytical attention to these dynamics. As Rebecca Solnit (2017) reminds us, “the stories that change the world come from places we have been taught to ignore or instructed not to see” (p. 56).

In this regard, the works gathered here demonstrate that activism is not limited to protest, rupture, or exceptional events. It also encompasses everyday initiatives, which may or may not be rooted in broader cycles of global mobilization. In our digitalized era, these articles highlight communication practices that creatively employ digital platforms, images, and hashtags to make activists’ worldviews visible. They also examine more “artisanal” forms of neighborhood communication, including posters, banners, murals, and participation in assemblies. Several contributions underscore the articulation between these different communicative resources.

Another key theme running through several articles is the importance of territory, whether as something to be defended, a medium for expression, or both. In other words, resistance on digital platforms has never meant abandoning struggles in the streets, squares, forests, and seas. These characteristics connect with broader traditions of Latin American popular movements, particularly in terms of cultural resignification from below (Martín-Barbero, 2024) and ongoing dialogue with territory (Fals Borda, 1986; Herrera-Huérffano et al., 2024), which together nurture a pedagogy of permanent mediation among social actors, times, and spaces (Freire, 2017).

In our current times of crisis, these activisms are reconfiguring ways of being, building community, and participating in public life. Ultimately, as Rossana Reguillo and Alina Peña Iguarán (2026) write in *El Vuelo de las Luciérnagas*, “even in the darkest night, there are lights that persist” (p. 14). The initiatives documented in this thematic section are among those small fireflies that continue to shine in the pursuit of social justice.

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