

**Call for Papers**  
**“Activism and Collective Action in the Digital Era:  
Political Communication and Social Change”**  
*[English version]*

Dates: **November 14th, 15th and 16th 2018**  
Address: **Universidad Internacional Menéndez Pelayo**  
**Plaza del Carmen, 4, Valencia, Spain**

*Direction:* **Guillermo López García**  
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What is the role of communication in the social and political struggles deployed by different contemporary forms of activism in the digital context? On the one hand, activist movements are forced to develop narratives that enhance their ability to operate in the symbolic domain, to mobilize their potential supporters and allies, and to ultimately transform reality. But along with this need for mobilization, activists also face the need to gain access to the general public, and make the relevance of their claims salient, so that they can produce significant social change. That is, political and social protest needs the mediation of the mass media in order to make their aspirations visible and legitimize them in the public sphere.

On the other hand, the emergence and consolidation of digital media as communication channels, and the resulting hybridization of media systems and practices eliminate old media monopoly of the public debate. The digital media open up a new arena, and provide activists with a wide repertoire of tools to self-organize, while diminishing their historic dependence on mass media and allowing them to directly access their preferred targeted groups.

This conference intends to explore the role of digital communication for activist struggles from a multidisciplinary perspective: as an intersection of three disciplines, i.e. communication, sociology and political science. Its goal is to explore both the role of communication in the internal processes within different protest movements, and the news media's role in making social and political struggles visible and (de)legitimize them. The following call for papers is articulated through six specific panels which explore complementary aspects of the outlined phenomenon.

## **Panel 1. News Coverage of Activist Social Struggles: Discourses and Images**

Coordinated by:

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This panel aims to analyze the specific characteristics of how the news media cover and report on different social and political struggles (news media coverage, information treatment, etc.). Its goal is to explore how different activist and protest movements are portrayed in the news media, and to observe whether news media outlets tend to legitimize or delegitimize their political aspirations. Particularly welcome are empirical works examining the following issues: news media coverage of different activist organizations; how activist programmatic goals are reflected in news stories; and, more generally, how different social movements are portrayed by different mass media (radio, television, press). In sum, this panel intends to explore the dominant media discourses and images of different forms of social and political activism. Specifically, the panel accepts contributions related to the following areas:

### **Representation of social and collective action in the news media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

- News media coverage of activists' social struggles in the early 21st century: features, dimensions and characteristics
- Evolution of the news media coverage: diachronic studies examining the news media coverage of social struggles through case studies or comparative approaches.

### **Social actors and journalistic sources**

- Construction of social actors' image and identity, and the legitimacy of their claims
- Old and new social struggles: from union demands to emerging protests. Institutionalization and news media coverage.
- The treatment of journalistic sources in the coverage of social struggles: access, identification and representativeness.

### **Trends of the news coverage of activists' social struggles**

- International approaches focusing on journalistic treatment of social struggles through comparative approaches in different countries and media outlets.
- Empirical studies of collective action and social struggles by scholars who do not belong to or identify with dominant "Western" perspectives.
- Photojournalism and social struggles: analysis of conflict representation.

## **Panel 2. Framing and Activism: Discourses Around Mobilization**

Coordinated by:

**Enric Castelló (Universitat Rovira i Virgili), [enric.castello@urv.cat](mailto:enric.castello@urv.cat)**  
**Lidia Valera Ordaz (Universidad de Valladolid), [lidia.valera@uva.es](mailto:lidia.valera@uva.es)**

In this panel, we accept theoretical and empirical contributions on the discursive and symbolic dimensions of social and political conflicts advanced by different forms of activism. Proposals grounded in framing research are welcome, but the panel is open to multidisciplinary contributions focusing on the symbolic and discursive efforts by different forms of activism, such as social movements, local communities, political parties and institutions. Therefore, we expect a variety of studies focusing on the symbolic dimensions of social change, including theoretical revisions or empirical studies from fields such as sociology, communication, political science or social psychology.

The contributions can explore all kind of forms of activism (such as, for example, political and gender claims, defence of collective rights, environmental protection, etc.). Among the works to be evaluated, contributions on the following topics are expected:

- Reviews and theoretical proposals on framing in relation to activism
- Frame building efforts by activist movements
- Frame sponsors and citizen mobilization
- The language of activism, its images, its spaces of expression
- Metaphor analysis and political activism
- Presence of collective action frames in news stories, propaganda, speeches, rallies, pamphlets, open assemblies
- News media frames on social and political conflicts
- Presence of frames in popular culture (comics, graphic novels, music, street art, etc.).
- Discourse of conflict by citizen movements
- Symbolic and discursive studies of demonstrations and mobilizations

The panel is particularly interested in learning how frames can generate an alternative knowledge and understandings of social conflicts, and how the frames deployed by activists are opposed to hegemonic definitions of such conflicts.

## **Panel 3. Activism in a Digital Era: New Strategies?**

Coordinated by:

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This panel is open to any theoretical or empirical proposals (although, preferably, we call for research contributions) that analyze how activism is conducted in the digital era. We welcome research papers studying how protests are articulated and

carried through the Internet (social networks, digital media, blogs, etc.). This includes both studies on the strategies deployed on the Internet by social movements that also operate through more conventional means (the Internet plays a supportive role) and case studies on digital activism in particular (the Internet serves as a foundation for activism).

Works on how traditional collective action has been transformed after the impact of digital technologies on social mobilization are welcome. We also will consider contributions examining the opportunities for dissemination, diffusion and organization provided by the Internet, as well as the threats of so-called slacktivism. This panel is interested in proposals that address the combination of offline and online activism strategies, too. Likewise, works of theoretical nature that reflect on the impact of the Internet on collective action are welcome.

The main research interests include:

- Social movements and digital collective action
- Digital collective action repertoires
- Strategies, resources and organization in digital activism
- Tools and platforms for digital political action
- Digital culture and cyber-activism
- Languages and identities in digital activism

#### **Panel 4. Political Activism in Electoral Processes**

Coordinated by:

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This panel deals with multiple forms of political activism conducted during electoral campaigns, including those activities that are carried out through the political parties and their organizational structures, and those emanating from other social actors (social groups, opinion leaders, etc.). This panel, therefore, accepts different types of empirical analysis related to this framework of action, particularly those that explore the following areas: a) political activism that affects the nature of political and news media messages in campaigns; b) political activism that influences vote intention; and c) political activism and citizen mobilization.

We are looking, more specifically, for research papers that fit into one of the following thematic axes:

- Analysis of electoral campaigns developed by political parties
- Media representation of political activism during campaigns. Media impact and journalistic representation
- Lobbies (trade unions, think tanks, organizations, NGOs, etc.) and their strategies to influence electoral campaigns
- Activists, supporters and sympathizers: activism integrated in the political parties. Techniques, speeches and strategies

- Non-formalized activism: citizen mobilizations in electoral campaigns
- Activism and clicktivism: the campaign in social media
- Emerging parties, new politics and the Americanization of electoral campaigns
- Activism and elections in comparative perspective
- Agenda setting and partisan campaign framing

## **Panel 5. Research Methods for Studying Social and Political Activism**

Coordinated by:

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This panel accepts works that propose methodological approaches for the study of political and social activism in the digital age, especially those that discuss the most appropriate research techniques to study collective action (in its multiple manifestations), and that discuss the epistemological benefits that each of these techniques has to offer. Therefore, we will accept academic works that discuss the specific ways through which we can understand and/or explain the processes of social and political mobilization in a digital context.

Particular attention will be paid to analyses related to the following issues:

- Possibilities offered by digital data (big data, social media, etc.) for the study of social and political activism
- Opportunities, limits and ethical issues related to obtaining and using digital data
- Data quality and representativeness in the digital environment
- Research methods that study the links between offline and online mobilizations
- Methodologies examining the links and influences between online mobilizations and the news media
- Methodologies analyzing the role played by social media, digital media and other technological actors (i.e. search engines) in online mobilizations when generating filter bubbles
- Methodologies for the study of leadership versus horizontality within social movements in the digital age
- The debate on the use of quantitative vs. qualitative techniques to study collective action
- Potentialities and limits of virtual ethnography/netnography to analyze collective action, especially mediated by the online dimension

## **Panel 6. Media Representations of Activism: Entertainment and Fiction**

Coordinated by:

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This panel aims to host a debate on the various media representations and cultural products focusing on different forms of social and political activism, in the domains of entertainment and fiction. Our purpose is to approach the study of cultural representations of collective action, including, among others, novels, films, television or new narratives (fiction podcasts, transmedia etc.).

The premise is that there is a reaction in the realm of creation to the processes of political intervention and social change, which is materialized through media and cultural representations. Some of these representations are placed in the past to draw parallels with the present and explore the memory of political struggle within a broader category that we could call the “politics of memory”, in which institutions, citizens and media and cultural industries participate.

While many of these cultural representations adopt the narrative framework of fiction, others arise from products such as the creative documentary or they are integrated within entertainment programs, such as competition shows, reality-shows or the huge variety of media forms resulting from the hybridization of television genres. These representations help establish the limit of social tolerance with dissent, and they often offer a privileged space to observe the level of interrelation between political participation and popular culture.

In this panel, we will accept research that analyzes how different forms of collective action, vindication, dissent, and protest are represented in entertainment and fiction, including novels, films, television and new narrative forms, such as radio podcasts and transmedia content. We welcome both case studies that deal with a specific cultural product, or comparative studies that include a larger sample and allow for the exploration of similar texts produced in different places.

The main research lines are the following:

- Cultural representations of political participation (popular assemblies' movement, social media digital activism...)
- Cultural representations of new political actors (new parties, leadership in “new politics”)
- Cultural representations of identity politics activism (feminism, LGBT+ movement, immigrants, functional diversity, nationalism)
- Cultural representations of associative movements (people affected by the banking crisis, people affected by mortgages and vulture funds, demands by neighborhood associations)
- Cultural representations within the framework of the “politics of memory” (the civil rights movement, mass graves, the Law of Historical Memory, transitional periods, national histories)