

Comunicação, Cidadania e Movimentos Sociais

Perspectivas contemporâneas da participação cidadã

Caroline Kraus Luvizotto e Isabel Ferin Cunha (Orgs.)

Prefácio: Piero Dominici



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(Orgs.)

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Prefácio Piero Dominici

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Todos os textos foram avaliados e seleccionados pelos organizadores da obra. Os comentários dos organizadores foram enviados aos autores, que, mediante a aprovação, receberam tempo hábil para eventuais correcções.

O livro foi posteriormente avaliado e aprovado pela avaliador externo Dr. Abel Suing que informou parecer positivo à publicação da seguinte forma: “O texto reúne 13 obras sobre comunicação, atletismo, mídia, regulação, movimentos sociais e desenvolvimento. Constitui um contributo para a compreensão dos fenómenos emergentes que configuram a participação dos cidadãos na formação da opinião pública, o enquadramento das tecnologias de comunicação nos modelos institucionais que devem garantir o bem-estar e a segurança das pessoas. O objetivo dos autores é identificar as condições para o exercício dos direitos dos cidadãos com base na liberdade de expressão. Os textos obedecem às formalidades académicas dos trabalhos de pesquisa, são redigidos de forma concisa, as premissas de cada estudo são apoiadas por bibliografia atualizada e específica, nos casos pertinentes as metodologias e instrumentos de pesquisa são detalhados, há também uma relação com os recursos digital e Web de realizações concretas que acompanham os estudos de caso”. O parecer foi enviado previamente ao lançamento.

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Sumário

Prefazione.....	13
<i>Prof. Piero Dominici</i>	
Prefácio.....	21
<i>Prof. Piero Dominici</i>	
Apresentação.....	29

Comunicação, Cidadania e Movimentos Sociais Perspectivas contemporâneas da participação cidadã

Mídia, Regulação e Movimentos Sociais em Portugal.....	37
<i>Caroline Kraus Luvizotto</i>	
<i>Isabel Ferin Cunha</i>	
Types of Development in Society and Hybrid Libraries.....	66
<i>Rafaela Carolina da Silva</i>	
<i>Rosângela Formentini Caldas</i>	
Democratização da Comunicação no Contexto da Mídiação: o que Muda para os Movimentos Sociais?.....	84
<i>Alana Nogueira Volpato</i>	
<i>Ana Carolina Trindade</i>	

Navegando a Onda de Ativismo no Desporto: um Estudo Exploratório das Manifestações Recentes..... 108

Fernando Borges

Cidadania, Acessibilidade e Direitos Culturais das Pessoas com Deficiência: Reflexões a partir da Pandemia de Covid-19 133

Flávia Piva Almeida Leite

Cintia Barudi Lopes

A Transparência e a LAI no Acompanhamento da Gestão Pública Local: um Estudo sobre o Conselho do Município de Bauru..... 152

Ana Cristina Consalter Amôr

Pedro Berti

Maria Carolina S. R. Vieira

Deliberação, Jornalismo e Mídiação: uma Análise do Debate Informal sobre o Caso “Fabrício Queiroz”..... 172

Lucas Arantes Zanetti

Laura Botosso Gomes da Silva

Milena Carolina de Almeida

Feminismo e os Movimentos Sociais: uma Análise da Produção Acadêmica acerca do Feminismo no Brasil 193

Denise Cristina Belam Fioravanti

Francisco Arrais Nascimento

Daniel Martínez-Ávila

Deise Maria Antonio Sabbag

Mídia Independente e Independência do Jornalismo: um Olhar sobre uma Rede em Busca de seus Caminhos..... 214

David Renault

Marcia Marques

Ana Elizabeth de Almeida Gomes

Who are the Contemporary Activists represented on
Portuguese TV News and what are They Fighting for? 239
Naide Feijó Müller Cajado Caldeira

Mulheres no Jornalismo Esportivo da Televisão Aberta Brasileira:
uma Análise do Programa Globo Esporte São Paulo..... 266
Érika Alfaro de Araújo
Mauro de Souza Ventura

“Prós e Contras” como Dispositivo Semiótico: Já Sabemos o que
Eles Vão Dizer?..... 293
Raquel Lourenço

Movimentos Sociais e Pandemia no Brasil de Bolsonaro..... 317
Carolina Castellitti
Elizabeth Arruda de Azevedo
Luiza Costa Melo
Luiz Felipe Sardinha Bonfim
Rafael de Castro Macedo
Raquel Guilherme de Lima

Os autores 345

Índice Remissivo 355

Who are the Contemporary Activists represented on Portuguese TV News and what are They Fighting for?

Naide Feijó Müller Cajado Caldeira

Significant social changes have recently taken place as contemporary activists are given the opportunity to become globally organized and no longer limited to their places of action. Internet and smart-phones enabled digital activism, shifting the way protests, movements and political events are organized and mobilizing numerous new supporters to a diverse range of causes (Baer, 2016; Bennett, 2014; Castells, 2017; Earl & Kimport, 2011). But do these changes triggered by digital activism result in effective tools to maximize the power of the imagination of contemporary activists and their ability to interfere in social change? If, on the one hand, some authors argue that we are witnessing a revival of some forms of activism with the cultivation of strong creative narratives on subjects as diverse as combating poverty, pollution, racism, climate change and social and economic justice (Cardoso et al., 2015; Jordan, 2002; Jouët, 2018), on the other hand, online activism has been criticized for not being followed or complemented by forms of off-line participation and often rejected as *clicktivism* or *slacktivism* (Gladwell, 2011; Halupka, 2014; Karpf, 2010;

Morozov, 2009; Shulman, 2009), supposedly fulfilling only the desire for instant self-satisfaction and having little or no impact on real political processes and concrete actions of citizens.

Also, in Portugal, there has been a scenario of social reconfiguration and pattern change arising from the era of “network communication” (Cardoso et al., 2015). But, despite the new configurations of political and social involvement and participation brought by digital activism, as well as new and unexpected forms of collective mobilization and activism (Campos, Pereira, & Simões, 2016), television is still the privileged medium of the vast majority of citizens in Portugal and Europe to access information (Burnay & Ribeiro, 2016, Standard Eurobarometer, 2017). Furthermore, television news strongly influences, by their representativeness, the construction and orientation of public opinion (Brandão, 2010, p. 134).

Based on the content analysis of the TV news reports that journalists identify as being about “activists” and “activism” - aired on the four Portuguese free-to-air channels - RTP 1; RTP 2; SIC e TVI - in 2017-, this article explores how these concepts are represented in the news programs and seeks clues about who are the activists represented, what space they occupy in the news programs, what causes they defend and what are the messages on activism transmitted to the public by contemporary television.

The Concept of Activism

There is no universally recognized definition of activism, and although it is a concept widely used in various contexts, the literature on this

topic, from a conceptual point of view, is scarce. Etymologically the word activism is recent, arises in the twentieth century, used in apolitical contexts and more associated with metaphysical issues (Joyce, 2014). In Europe, the term was used to refer to the “physical world of nations, power, and politics,” and in the speech about World War I, activism was used by a British journalist to describe active support for Germany. During the years of World War II, the word activism was little mentioned, but in the 1950s a definition of activism emerged that combined the early-twentieth-century connotation of “passionate political belief” and the connotation of the progressive era of personal involvement in social transformation (Joyce, 2014, p. 15). The concept acquired contemporary contours to mean “personal involvement in activities that bring about political and social transformation,” and researchers in the 1960s constructed their studies on this meaning (Joyce, 2014, p. 16).

The definition of activism in the *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice* describes it as “an action in the name of a cause, an action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine” (Martin, 2007, p. 19). From a historical point of view, activism has played an important role in ending slavery, defying dictatorships, protecting workers from exploitation, protecting the environment, promoting equality for women, opposing racism and many other important issues, however, activism can also be used for other purposes such as attacking minorities or promoting war, so activism is not necessarily something good or bad. It all depends on the cause, actions, and appreciation of each individual on what “is worth” to defend (Martin, 2007, p. 19). It is usually those who hold less power in society who resort to activism since those who

hold positions of power and influence can usually achieve their goals through conventional means (Martin, 2007, pp. 19-20).

Jordan (2002) argues that traditional political battles are being replaced by collective practices that give rise to different types of new political activism, refuting schools of thought that defend that Western culture has never been more politically apathetic than now. For example, in March 2019, inspired by the Swedish 16-year-old climate activist, Greta Thunberg, the world witnessed the Global Climate Strike, where teenagers from everywhere, including Portugal, skipped school to fight for a greener planet. In this perspective, 21st-century societies are generating new meanings about what is a “good life” and these new meanings are gaining authority and affecting everyday life (Jordan, 2002, p. 8).

Historically the concept has been closely associated with joint action with the motivation to achieve political change. But the concept of political action itself incorporates several dimensions and a wide range of actions that are also experiencing ongoing changes in Western societies, some related to the usual distinction between left, center and right, which is presenting itself as problematic when offered to the new generations as secular ideological separation (Jordan, 2002).

The different approaches and definitions of activism are related to the fact that the “activist” represents a “negotiated identity”. Previous research provides clues about how actors in activist movements challenge definitions and challenge self-identification about being “activists” (Bobel, 2007; Corrigan-Brown, 2012; Gamson, 1995). To help in the understanding of competing for cultural constructs about what an “activist” is and what they do, the findings of Cortese (2015) allowed

the creation of three types of “activists” - —Emphatics, Demarcators, and Reconcilers (Cortese, 2015, p. 217).

There are also several methods of activism. Gene Sharp (2005) divides methods of nonviolent action into three main types. First, methods of protest and persuasion that go beyond conventional behaviors, such as speeches, slogans, posters, protests, vigils, songs, marches, and lectures. The second type of non-violent action is non-cooperation, disobedience to social customs, protest emigration, producer boycotts, bank withdrawal, international trade embargo, and a wide variety of strikes. The third type is intervention, including nonviolent occupations, guerrilla theatre, fasting, and the creation of alternative economic and political institutions (Sharp, 2005, pp. 25-30). Between nonviolent action and armed struggle is violence against physical objects, such as sabotage of oil pipelines or genetically modified plantations (Martin, 2007, p. 21).

Media and Democracy

Since media studies are not dissociated from culture and “cannot be seen in isolation from (the rest of) the social” (Carpentier, 2011, p. 146), they can address the ever-expanding ethical, political, and social dilemmas by asking, among other important and relevant questions: Who are the groups and/or individuals who are actively involved in today’s urgent social issues and in what way do they occupy, or seek to occupy, public space in their function of resistance to broader and more established cultural forces? This paper aims to contribute to this debate, assuming that in a healthy democracy the public sphere demands that urgent

socio-political dilemmas be the object of vigorous public contestation as the one activist groups usually provides (Benhabib, 1996).

The historian André Canhoto Costa (2019) reminds us that historically and culturally Portugal “seems to have been the victim of permanent instability, generating revolutions behind revolutions, none deep enough to reverse the process of relative poverty” in comparison with the countries of the Northern Europe (Costa, 2019, p. 19).

When we speak of the media we speak not only of types of technology and parts of the content we choose, we speak of a view of the media as external agents that affect us in various ways and recognizing that the uses and appropriations of the media penetrate all aspects of the contemporary life (Deuze, 2011, p. 137). On the dynamics of weights and balances existing in the public space, which are amplified or silenced through the media, Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann (1974) argued that those who hold the majority opinions in the public space tend, even indirectly, to silence those who hold minority opinions which, for fear of punishment, end up not exposing their ideas. According to the psychological and social mechanism called the “Spiral of Silence,” the mass media “must be seen as creators of public opinion since they provide the environmental context to which people respond with spontaneity, agreement or silence” (Noelle-Neumann, 1974, pp. 43-51).

From the point of view of the democratic discourse and of participatory democracy, the information economy network offers a real reorganization of the public sphere (Benkler, 2006, p. 465). However, this does not mean that the basic functions of traditional media are no longer of the utmost importance, and some authors point out the real and inherent dangers of a discourse and an excessively optimistic perception of the new media and

what they represent for social changes around democratic values (Couldry, 2004; Curran, 2012; Sandoval & Fuchs, 2010). Therefore, it is important to remember that the new and old media are ‘living’ in contemporary societies in an articulated way with the new ones complementing the old ones and thus utopian visions on what can be achieved by digital media will not materialize (Ribeiro, 2015, p. 212).

Concerning the relevance of investigating television in this social and communicational context, it is important to highlight that although there are perspectives that believe that the media reconfiguration brought about by the digital environment will mean that television will no longer be a relevant medium in the short term, especially among the younger ones, the evidence points to a scenario of complementarity (Vicente, 2016). In fact, although a decline in the traditional pay-tv industry in the US market (the largest in the world) is expected by 2023 due to the rise of streaming, the inability of public broadcasters to achieve significant revenue increases and strong competitiveness challenges (Global Entertainment & Media Outlook 2019 - 2023), television continues to have a “major centrality in social life (time use, customs and social sharing) and economic (weight in advertising pie, distribution channel for creative industries)”, remaining the” icon of the traditional media par excellence “ (Cardoso, et al., 2017, p. 9).

Television in Portugal, in general, and the generalist channels in particular, seek to adapt to the conjuncture of media convergence and technological transformation, and its study remains relevant both due to the uncertainties arising from digital transformation and the impact that these changes have in the reorganization of the sector and in the new practices of audiovisual consumption (Cardoso et al., 2017; Sobral, 2012).

Television continues to be the privileged mean for the vast majority of citizens in Portugal and Europe to access information (Burnay & Ribeiro, 2016; Standard Eurobarometer, 2017; Cardoso et al., 2017; Gonçalves, 2015). The analysis of television consumption in Portugal, in the last 17 years, indicates that, along with the progressive growth of cable television channels, in Prime-time, there is a growth of the thematic genres “News”, “Series” and “Entertainment” (Cardoso et al., 2017, p. 26). It should also be noted that the “News” genre increased audiences on private channels, SIC and TVI, and lost audiences on public channels RTP1 and RTP2. Overall, it was the genre that increased ratings on more channels, reinforcing the Portuguese public’s preference for the news genre on television (Cardoso et al. 2017, p. 35).

The media are essential for certain groups to be publicly positioned with legitimacy to defend a cause and are decisive in validating the activists themselves as revealing actors in the social arena (Bucy & Gregson, 2001), because “through the media sphere, citizens can use their generative powers to become part of the societal decision-making processes or to resist them” (Carpentier, 2011, p. 147). To generate positive social change the power and systems approach emphasizes that we first need to understand how power is distributed and can be re-distributed between and within social groups (Green, 2016) and television news representations have a fundamental role in these processes. However, celebrity and consumerism cultures and the economic constraints of the media industries lead to practices and representations that tend to ignore the agenda of activist movements or limit the intervention of “non-media elites” in (mainstream) media organizations (Carpentier, 2011; Hackett, 2000; Hanania, 2016).

The Methodology of the Study

For this study, we have identified all the news programs transmitted on the four Portuguese free-to-air channels - RTP 1, RTP 2, SIC, TVI - that used the words “activism” and “activists” in the year 2017.¹ That is, the present analysis focuses on the news that the journalists themselves identified as being about activism and activists, having used these terms specifically in the presentation/reporting of the news.

The choice of these channels was based on the fact that their content is representative of the content produced in Portuguese newsrooms. Furthermore, these are the channels that reach a larger number of viewers, according to CAEM / GFK audiometry data. A significant part of the population considers that these channels offer “sufficient programs for the satisfaction of [their] informative and recreational needs” (Burnay & Ribeiro, 2016, p. 25).

When analyzing the news transmitted on the four Portuguese free-to-air channels we intend to answer the following research questions:

- 1 - How many times news programs of the Portuguese free-to-air television channels mentioned the “words “activism” and “activists” in 2017?
- 2 - What causes, movements and representations are associated with the concept of activism on the four Portuguese free-to-air channels?

For the content analysis, we carried out a selection of the dimensions on which the research was intended to focus, creating a series of

1. This survey was carried out with the support of Cision Portugal.

variables that served as a structure to the thematic categorical content analysis. The categories were created through an inductive process and also drawing on inspiration from the empirical studies carried out by researchers from the University of Amsterdam (Arbaoui, Swert & Der Brug, 2016), consisting of a content analysis of a sample of 29 daily news broadcasts on public and private television stations, and Nuno Goulart Brandão's (2006, p. 151) work on the Portuguese television news programs of 2003.

Quantitative Content Analysis Variables

Variable 1 - *News* - This variable analyzes the number of news items of the four Portuguese free-to-air channels (RTP1, RTP2, SIC, TVI) that mentioned the words “activism” and “activists” in 2017.

Variable 2 - *Channel* - This variable examines the number of news stories aired by each channel.

Variable 3 - *Program* - This variable analyzes the number of news reports in each news program aired in the four channels. The programs covered in our analysis are: RTP 1 – Bom Dia Portugal (from Monday to Friday); Jornal da Tarde (daily); Telejornal (Daily), Sexta às 9 (Friday's) || RTP2 - Journal 2 (Daily); || SIC – Edição da Manhã (from Monday to Friday); Primeiro Jornal (daily); Jornal da Noite (Daily); || TVI - Diário da Manhã (from 2nd to 6th F); Jornal da Uma (daily); and Jornal das 8 (daily).

Variable 4 - *Repeats* - This variable analyzes the number of times each news item is repeated.

Variable 5 - *Duration of the News* - This variable analyzes the temporal durations of the television/news items under study.

Qualitative Content Analysis Variables

Variable 6 - *Positioning* - This variable refers to the location that the news item occupies in the schedule of the news program. This will allow to verify the relevance that was attributed to the news, assuming that the opening news stories are considered more relevant by the newsroom (Brandão, 2006, p. 158). In the case of television news, it will be analyzed whether the news is at the *beginning, middle or end* of the program.

Variable 7 - *Sensationalism audiovisual image* - Characteristics that stimulate the human sensory system as the use of background music in the news will be evaluated in television items; the use of special effects in images (slow motion, acceleration of movement, repetition of visual effects, close-ups, soft focus); and the use of pictorial or graphic representation (Arbaoui, Swert & der Brug, 2016, pp.8-9). This variable determines if the news under analysis integrates the sensational elements, from the point of view of the audiovisual image and has two possibilities of categorization: *yes or no*.

Variable 8 - *Causes* - This variable identifies the type of causes defended in the television news under analysis: *Human rights* - This category includes all the news items that refer to the defense of the rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. *Environmental / Nature Rights* - This category identifies all the news that refers to the rights of nature and the ethics of environmental protection (Cullinan, 2011; Nash, 1989; Klein, 2014).

Animal rights - This category includes all the news items that refer to the protection of non-human animals (Cavaliere, 2002; Singer, 2009).

Variable 9 - Type of Actors / Activist Organizations - Three categories were created: *micro-level* - activist individuals who can integrate protest networks stimulated by the crowd but are not connected to any kind of social movement organization; *meso level* - collective actors in the organization of mobilizations, that is, collective formations in which some individuals come together to interact on a stable basis; *macrosocial level* - activists that assume to integrate a specific collective social movement, organized in time and space, according to his political culture, target audiences, causes, objectives, and ability to influence mobilizations (Mattoni & Treré, 2014, pp. 256-257). At each of these levels, the names of activist organizations will also be identified.

Variable 10 - Geographical Treatment - This variable makes it possible to categorize the news “predominant at the *national* level and which are at the *international* level” (Brandão, 2006, p. 157).

Variable 11 - Tone / Valencia - This variable evaluates “whether the news contains a *neutral, positive or negative* tone concerning the activists’ actions, there is, corresponding to the so-called “neutral news”, “good news “or” “bad news” (Brandão, 2006, p. 158).

Variable 12 - Title - This variable identifies the subject of the news. In the case of television news items that do not have a specific title, it identifies the concrete issue reported in the television piece, using the opening/introduction of the theme or the information present in the footnotes, if they exist.

Variable 13 - Spokespersons for activist causes - This variable identifies who are the spokespersons explaining what is at stake and

what the activist's claims are. The options of categorization are: *common citizen; specialist from outside the organization, specialist from the organization; organization institutional spokesperson; public figure or other* (voice of journalists in the narration of events). The same news item can include spokespersons in more than one category.

Variable 14 - Type of activist action - The analysis of this variable intends to determine which type of activist action prevails in the news under analysis and has the following categorization possibilities: *Methods of protest and persuasion; non-cooperation; intervention* (Sharp, 2005, pp. 25-30); *violence against physical objects and violent action* - Armed struggle (Martin, 2007, p. 21).

Variable 15 - Confrontations - This variable examines whether television news items that refer to the concepts of "activism" and "activists" report and/or show images of physical confrontations/violence between police/authorities and activists.

Variable 16 - Profile - Analyzes whether the news refers to activists as *victims, aggressors or is neutral* concerning these criteria.

Variable 17 – Online Sources - This variable analyzes if the TV news refers to sources of information that have been originated or have developed in the digital environment on social media, sites, blogs or others (properly identified).

Results and Analysis

The first objective was to quantify how many times the news programs of the Portuguese free-to-air channels mentioned the "words "activism" and "activists" in 2017 and the following results were obtained:

Table 1

News programs broadcast on the free-to-air Portuguese channels with and without reference to the concepts of “activists” and “activism”

Program/Channel	Nº of Transmissions 2017	Nº of News No/ Ref. Activism	% Programs With/ Ref. Activism
Bom Dia Portugal (RTP 1)	250	197	21,20%
Portugal em Directo (RTP 1)	250	246	1,60%
Jornal da Tarde (RTP 1)	365	340	6,85%
Telejornal (RTP 1)	365	341	6,58%
Sexta às 9 (RTP 1)	52	51	1,92%
Jornal 2 (RTP 2)	365	352	3,56%
Edição da Manhã (SIC)	250	224	10,40%
Primeiro Jornal (SIC)	365	348	4,66%
Jornal da Noite (SIC)	365	253	3,29%
Diário da Manhã (TVI)	250	221	11,60%
Jornal da Uma (TVI)	365	347	4,93%
Jornal das Oito (TVI)	365	344	5,75%

(Source & Cision, 2017)

The above-identified programs of the Portuguese free-to-air channels (RTP 1, RTP, SIC and TVI) 2) referred to the concepts of “activism” and “activists” 243 times in 2017. It is possible to see that the **news program** that most referred these concepts is the morning newscast “Bom Dia Portugal” aired on the public channel. 21,20 % of the daily editions of this newscast mentioned the concept of “activists” or “activism”. The morning news programs are, in general, the ones that mention more these concepts.

Examining the number of news stories published by each **channel** it is possible to see that the public channel RTP 1 was the one that mentioned more times the words “activism” and “activists” – 107 times. From all the news items mentioning the two words, 99 were **original items** and 144 were **repeated** by the different programs in different schedules which reduces substantially the actual total number of “stories” related to these concepts.

The **duration of the news** items ranges between 23 seconds (shorter) and 8 minutes and 9 seconds (longer). Most of the news items is **positioned** in the middle of the program (172), with 47 positioned at the beginning and 24 at the end. Regarding the variable **sensationalism in the audiovisual image**, the vast majority of the analyzed news items - 238 - did not reveal these indicators. Only 5 items showed shocking visual effects and, unnecessary (for the informative purpose) repetition of visual effects.

With regard to the **causes** defended, Human Rights was the topic that obtained the highest number of references in the news (129), followed by references to forms of political activism (66). This is followed by environmental rights (30) and the news in which more than one cause was defended. The news that referred to animals' rights were nine. For the sake of optimizing the space available for this article, we removed several graphs and results tables.

Concerning the **Type of Actors/activist organizations**, it was at the micro-level, with 44% of the television news report, that more references were detected. Crossing this variable with the variable **geographical location** it is possible to observe that only 8 of these news reports are of national scope, that is, of the 107 items that refer to forms of unorganized activism, the great majority is about international issues. 47 news items referred to the meso level and, at this level, 18 of the news reports are dedicated to national events. Still, regarding the geographical location, most of the references are to international activism (165), with only 78 news reports referring to national activist initiatives.

At the macro level, 85 items were analyzed. At this level the references of national scope increase significantly, only 35 news are of

an international scope, which may be an indicator that more television attention is given, at a local level, to activist initiatives that result from movements organized in time and space.

Also at the macro level it was possible to identify the following organizations mentioned in the analyzed news items: International Amnesty (AI); Black Lives Matter; Red Line Campaign; National Council of Activists of Angola; Islamic state; Group of Activists in Treatment (GAT); Greenpeace; Pro Tejo Movement; Spanish Platform of Toledo; Quercus; National Geographic; Zero; Anti-Nuclear Iberian Movement; SOSAnimal; UMAR; Network Activists “Stop sexism build equality”.

The analysis of the **Tone** variable indicates that the associations made to the activists present in the television news reports, namely through voice off or voiceover, are mostly positive (180), which suggests that television follows the model of watchdog journalism that oversees the activities of public authorities on behalf of citizens (Dyck & Zingales, 2002, Serrin & Serrin, 2002) by giving attention to movements or events that denounce the State’s shortcomings.

The identification of the **spokespersons for activist causes**, reveals that in the television news reports analyzed, the ordinary citizens are the privileged spokespersons (88), followed by news reports with only the voice of the journalist (66).

The **type of activist action** which prevails in the television news reports, 96%, is clearly the protest and persuasion with street actions (artistic expressions, street protests, conferences, specific campaigns, reporting of abuses), followed by violence against physical objects or violent action (3%) and non-cooperation (1%). The great majority of the

television news reports analyzed do not show images of physical **confrontations**/violence between police authorities and protestors/ activists.

According to a study that analyzed the YouTube channels of two virtual feminist communities dealing with violence against women, the signs of audiovisual messages are complex and use semiotic artifacts that produce meaning on the variation of the term “victim” or “aggressor”, (Núñez, Fernández, & Rubira, 2015). Thus, the vast majority of the analyzed items are neutral in relation to the **profile of the activists** (203), with 30 of the television news reports, in contexts of evident violations of fundamental human rights, presenting the activists as victims and only 10 present them as aggressors.

In the **online variable** only 5% of the news items have been originated or have developed in the digital environment, related to topics as demonstrations against a sexist decision of the Court of Appeal in Portugal, movements of protests against Donald Trump’s policies, International Amnesty campaigns, the disrespect of Human Rights in China and cancellation of an LGBT exhibit in Brazil. The sources of the news are the institutional websites, Twitter and Facebook.

Discussion

Studying the concept of activism presents a series of limitations by the very subjectivity of what it implies, exposed to conjectural interferences related to the geopolitical location, the temporal and cultural space context in which the initiatives associated to the concept develop and also to the psychological and social automatisms of the individuals (Núñez, Fernández, & Rubira, 2015). The present analysis reflects these

limitations insofar as the events that generate television news reports associated with the concepts of “activism” and “activists” are also conjectural, and there may be reports associated with activist actions and organizations who, not being specifically mentioned by journalists as such, have been left out of the scope of the analysis. On the other hand, the methodological options underlying the criterion of selection of the television news items for analysis exclude other variants of expressions related to the phenomenon, such as the term “activist” in the singular, because we have privileged the variant of collective social action. Similarly, it will be interesting in the future to deepen the intersection of data obtained in some dimensions and to analyze trends over time.

However, it was possible to respond to the research questions posed and to quantify and identify what causes, movements and representations are associated with these concepts in Portuguese television news programs. The analysis turned out to be elucidative concerning the subjects covered, the most represented causes that are of international scope and fundamentally related to political and human rights issues. As social practices with great mutability, activist actions are also the target of a volatile media projection (Estanque & Bebiano, 2007), still, it was possible to observe that the news programs analysed do not highlight the action of the activist groups that commit violent acts, nor do they reveal signs of sensationalistic audiovisual coverage. On the other hand, concrete actions on the ground are favored, whose spokespersons are ordinary citizens at the micro-level. This may reflect the tendency of the media system for the progressive increase of interaction and identification with audiences (Brandão, 2010, p. 95). It was possible to see that the Portuguese public television channel (RTP 1) was the

one that mentioned these concepts the most. This may be related to the discussion about the role of public television in stimulating participation as a space for informed citizenship (Brandão, 2010, p. 164).

Most of the references to the concepts in Portuguese television news programs of free-to-air channels in 2017 are to international activism. But at national level the attention is mostly given to activist initiatives that result from movements organized in time and space at the macro level. When analyzing the airtime dedicated to activism, the number of programs that referred to the concepts of “activism” and “activists” is reduced. The morning news programs are, in general, the ones that mention more these concepts. The fact that news are placed mainly in the middle of the news programs, without major prominence, with most of the news to be repetitions of international issues, seems to indicate that, on the one hand, in the national context the activist action is not muscled enough to attract television media attention, or, on the other, that the free to air television channels undervalue the coverage of activist actions. Also noteworthy for these considerations is the fact that only 5% of the news have been originated or have developed in the digital environment, which may suggest a gap between what television screens show and how certain topics become relevant online.

If technologies have brought a new space of visibility to activist organizations that defend human, civil, environmental and animal rights, they have also made it possible for extremist organizations and totalitarian movements to create virtual spaces that undermine public confidence in elections, in the courts, in the traditional media, and in science, with conspiracy theories, false narratives and ignorant perspectives on religion and race (Albright, 2018, pp. 20-30). In this

context, those who define and seek to influence what is reported in the TV news programs, have a greater responsibility and interest to provide perspectives that allow us greater independence from the most varied attempts of “intellectual subjugation” inherent to the production and dissemination of information (Tornero & Varis, 2010, pp. 24-26). It is important to present citizens with other possibilities for public participation with the capacity to assert a set of social “counter-powers”. A kind of “parallel system that, far from being undemocratic, presupposes a healthy relationship between governors and the governed”, based on the use of instruments of evaluation, control and accountability of the actions of the governments that, by consecrating impartiality, plurality and proximity, are capable of limiting the “absolutism” of the legitimized rulers by the consecration of the elections (Teixeira, 2018, pp. 123-127).

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