

Activist discourse and its influence on social change

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Abstract. The study aimed to determine how discursive formulas, visual codes, and networked practices structured protest movements and contributed to social change across three national contexts: the United States, Brazil, and Turkey. The research was conducted on the basis of open sources, archival media materials, images and videos, as well as corpora of social media publications. Sequential stages included a historical-comparative review of the concept of activism, discursive analysis of slogans, content analysis of visual objects, and a comparison of media representations, followed by an assessment of social outcomes. The principal findings indicated that short, rhythmic formulas in the United States and Brazil functioned as markers of collective identity and as interpretive frames, consolidating meanings around demands for justice, bodily autonomy, and institutional accountability. Visual elements – such as the raised fist and contrasting black, white, and yellow compositions in American cities, as well as pink-violet palettes and memes in the Brazilian social media segment – served as low-threshold carriers of meaning and enabled rapid replication in both offline and online environments. In Turkey, the combination of slogans, ironic cartoons, and graffiti created an alternative informational ecosystem. Analysis of news formats demonstrated a systematic divergence between fast-paced television reporting and analytical newspaper coverage: the former tended to emphasise conflictual episodes, whereas the latter concentrated on structural causes and legal consequences. The social effects included the intensification of political debates on law-enforcement practices in the United States, the activation of women's networks and the incorporation of equality issues into party platforms in Brazil, as well as the emergence of new civic initiatives and a rise in political awareness among young people in Turkey. The practical value of the study lies in the applicability of the proposed analytical framework for planning communications of civic initiatives, assessing media strategies, and developing an evidence base for public policy

Keywords: political consciousness; collective identity; civic resistance; slogans; feminism; satire

INTRODUCTION

Activism is understood as a purposeful form of social participation that entails organised actions aimed at achieving social or political change beyond the bounds of routine civic engagement. In contrast to volunteering or lobbying, it has a more persistent and often confrontational character, combining mass demonstrations, digital campaigns, and other modes of mobilisation. In scholarly discourse, activism is conceptualised as a means of collective influence on institutions and norms through coordinated actions and the generation of public pressure. The study of digital activism has gained prominence because political and social movements since the mid-2000s have increasingly used

digital media as a primary channel for mobilisation, communication, and representation. Protest events in different countries have demonstrated that networked platforms not only transmit information but also generate distinctive discursive frames within which collective identity, symbols, and the meaning of resistance were constructed. In many instances, activists' visual, linguistic, and digital strategies shaped not only public perceptions of protests but also subsequent political transformations. This underscores the need to examine the discursive nature of activist movements through the prism of slogans, visual materials, social media, and media representations.

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L. Schlogl's (2022) study demonstrated that digital activism was closely associated with the emergence of the so-called "hashtag generation". The author emphasised that middle-class groups in different countries used social media as a space for self-identification and political participation. The research found that digital practices became a key instrument of transnational mobilisation, enabling the alignment of local demands with global issues. This indicated that activism extended beyond the boundaries of individual states and acquired the characteristics of a global communication network. The study by M.M. Imran & N.U.A. Raza (2023) focused on the role of social-media discourse as a driver of social change. The authors established that digital platforms created conditions for new models of communication, in which short formulas, hashtags, and visual symbols performed a mobilising function. Their findings showed that online discourse mattered not only as a reflection of protest but as a factor shaping its intensity and its capacity to influence institutional processes.

The analysis by M. Eilert & A. Nappier Cherup (2020) examined a different dimension – corporate activism. The authors demonstrated that companies positioning themselves as participants in social change could play a dual role: on the one hand, supporting the demands of social movements, and on the other, using activist discourse as a component of institutional image-building. The study showed that, under conditions of global publicity, commercial entities were compelled to respond to societal expectations, creating new challenges for delineating the boundaries between genuine activism and strategic branding. The research conducted by M. Schulte *et al.* (2020) focused on the concept of social identity in relation to environmental activism. The authors concluded that a sense of belonging to a particular social group constituted the primary driver of transformative change. The findings revealed that individual practices acquired significance only when embedded within a collective context, explaining why digital campaigns succeeded in cases where they produced an effect of group solidarity.

The study by A. Cortés-Ramos *et al.* (2021) established that digital platforms provided youth movements with new forms of participation in political and social life. The authors demonstrated that young people used social media not only as a channel of communication but also as a medium for forming political subjectivity. It was found that communication practices on digital platforms created mechanisms for integrating local initiatives into a broader context, thereby strengthening the impact of youth activism. The publication by H. Zur & T. Hatuka (2023) introduced an important dimension of locality into the study of digital activism. The researchers demonstrated that protest practices were not detached from specific spaces; on the contrary, they combined digital tools with bodily presence in urban environments. The authors concluded that space, social media, and corporeality interacted as an integrated complex that shaped the character of local protests. This helped to explain why certain actions generated stronger resonance when digital and physical activity intersected.

The study by G. Sorce & D. Dumitrica (2022) highlighted the transnational dimensions of digital activism. The authors demonstrated that protest movements increasingly assumed a global character, with symbols, slogans, and hashtags circulating across countries and adapting to local contexts. It was established that digital activism functioned as a field of cultural transfer, in which local movements gained additional visibility through the international dissemination of their messages. The article by C. Barter & S. Koulu (2021) showed that digital technologies played a critical role in countering gender-based violence. The authors found that online platforms were used both as a space for exposing cases of discrimination and as a channel for forming communities of solidarity and recovery. The research demonstrated that digital tools could function not only as mechanisms of mobilisation but also as an infrastructure for healing after traumatic experiences.

Despite the substantial body of existing research, several gaps remained that required further analysis. Previous studies largely concentrated on individual dimensions of activism – global diffusion, social identity, corporate strategies, or local-digital intersections. However, insufficient attention was paid to how specific discursive strategies – slogans, visual imagery, digital networks, and media representations – were combined into an integrated system that shaped the field of protest movements within particular countries and, simultaneously, from a transnational perspective. Particular attention was required to determine how these strategies influenced the formation of political consciousness and the social outcomes of protests. This study aimed to identify how the discursive strategies of activist movements were enacted in different countries, and how linguistic, visual, digital, and media components were combined in processes of mobilisation and social change. The research tasks encompassed several directions: identifying the linguistic formulas of protest; examining visual materials – graffiti, posters, photographs – as instruments of symbolic communication; determining the significance of social media for organising and disseminating protest discourse; and establishing the social effects of protests, including their influence on the formation of new movements and the transformation of political consciousness.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted from March to June 2025 on the basis of open sources, archival media publications, visual materials, and content from social media. The objective was to identify discursive and visual strategies of protest movements in the USA, Brazil, and Turkey. The selection of these countries was determined by their representation of three political models – democratic, transitional, and authoritarian – which enabled an examination of protest discourse under varying levels of institutional constraint. This comparison makes it possible to analyse three types of interaction among linguistic, visual, and digital strategies that shape the mechanisms of collective mobilisation and the articulation of demands. Sources were selected

according to the principle of representativeness and included materials reflecting protest activity in the USA, Brazil, and Turkey, with an emphasis on textual, visual, and digital content. The inclusion criteria comprised peak periods of mobilisation, clearly identifiable communication strategies, and source originality, excluding duplicates, unattributed materials, and content lacking protest-related meaning.

In the first stage of the study, which focused on the analysis of the concept of activism and its historical origins, a historical-comparative method was applied. It drew upon descriptions of workers' strikes and the formation of trade unions (Nyiramukama, 2024); materials on the suffragist movements and their first convention in Seneca Falls (Johnston, n.d.); and curated collections on pacifist, liberal, and socialist movements of the early twentieth century (Special collections..., n.d.). The analysis of slogans in the USA included the formulas "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) and "No Justice – No Peace", documented in posters and social media publications during the protest waves of 2013–2020 (Francis & Wright-Rigueur, 2021; Hogan *et al.*, 2021). In Brazil, the expressions "Meu corpo, minhas regras" (My body, my rules) and related variations were examined, as recorded in protest actions and digital campaigns against gender-based violence (Loureiro, 2023). In Turkey, the material consisted of the slogan "Her yer Taksim, her yer direniş", widely represented in protest posters, graffiti, and networked publications in 2013 (Gruber, 2017). A discursive analysis was applied to this material, enabling the identification of the semantic frames of protest speech, the detection of recurrent structures, and the clarification of how short formulas fulfilled mobilising and identity-forming functions.

The next stage concerned the study of the visual culture of protests. The material consisted of posters, murals, graffiti, satirical drawings, and photographs and videos from protest sites. In the USA, the analysis focused on images of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the raised-fist symbol, which had become a marker of collective solidarity (Jackson, 2020; Lohan, 2020). In Brazil, attention was given to the use of colour codes in posters and to Facebook (n.d.) memes that mocked patriarchal stereotypes. In Turkey, the material included satirical graffiti and cartoons, as well as public exhibitions of humorous magazine covers ("the museum of the revolution") (Altay, 2013). A content-analysis method was applied for this stage, involving the classification of images by theme, colour palette, symbolic repertoire, and types of graphic techniques.

Subsequently, an analysis of digital platforms was conducted. In the USA, the primary focus was on X (Twitter) (n.d.) and Instagram (n.d.), where large waves of posts were recorded using hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #SayHerName, and others. In Brazil, Facebook groups were examined, particularly Mulheres Unidas Contra Bolsonaro (n.d.), which contained personal testimonies of violence. In Turkey, the material consisted of a corpus of tweets related to the Gezi Park protests, as well as YouTube videos (Bosphorus Jazz Choir at Gezi Park, 2013; The new

Gezi Park..., 2014; This is life after Gezi..., 2014), which served as evidence of police violence. A method of digital content analysis was applied to these sources, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques. On the one hand, the dynamics of hashtag dissemination and the volume of publications were examined; on the other, the substantive content of posts, the functions of memes, and the types of video materials were analysed.

The final stage focused on the social effects of the protests. In the USA, attention centred on political reforms (Bill of the United States Congress No. H.R.7120, 2020) was discussed following the intensification of the Black Lives Matter movement, particularly the introduction of body cameras, revisions to search procedures, and strengthened police accountability. In Brazil, the analysis addressed the outcomes of women's campaigns, which contributed to the emergence of new policies supporting women, the development of shelters, and the establishment of psychological assistance programmes. In Turkey, the study examined the rise of civic engagement after Gezi Park, the formation of environmental movements, and the increase in political awareness among young people (Kirişçi, 2013; Taştan, 2013; Uzun, 2019). This stage employed a method of secondary analysis based on data from civil society reports, academic publications, and media sources.

RESULTS

Historical origins of activism. The dynamics of activist movements are delineated through the interplay of deliberate influence on social structures, practical action, and coordinated interaction among participants. These parameters define the characteristics of protest processes in different countries and provide a foundation for analysing their discursive and visual manifestations (Piatak & Mikelsen, 2021). In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, labour movements were of particular significance, encompassing strikes, the formation of trade unions, and demands for improved working conditions. These movements demonstrated the logic of activist engagement: groups organised to demand changes in legislation, working conditions, and social policy (Nyiramukama, 2024). In parallel, women's suffrage movements developed, particularly in the United Kingdom and the USA, where activists demanded voting rights for women through petitions, rallies, and symbolic actions. For example, the first women's rights convention in the USA took place in Seneca Falls in 1848, initiating a prolonged struggle for women's suffrage (Johnston, n.d.). From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, pacifist movements and various liberal and socialist groups also emerged, advocating for peace, social reforms, press freedom, educational initiatives, and other forms of change (Special collections..., n.d.). The activist logic of these movements was expressed through public gatherings, organised campaigns, the distribution of leaflets, and educational activities. In the twentieth century, activism underwent intensified institutional and media transformation. In the 1960s and 1970s in the USA, the

civil rights movement became a central example. Activists organised boycotts, marches, and sit-ins, demonstrating civil disobedience in response to racial laws. The Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956) and the March on Washington (1963) (Fig. 1) became symbols of a mass movement and of the use of street action as a form of political pressure (Cook, 2023; Milkis & Rader, 2024).



Figure 1. Participants in the March on Washington holding placards with slogans, 28 August 1963; photograph by Cecil Stoughton

Source: S.F. Chandler (2020)

In Europe, student movements in France in 1968 protested against the university system and authoritarianism, forming part of the broader “global protest year” of 1968 (Young, 2020). In the second half of the twentieth century, women’s rights movements, anti-war movements (particularly against the Vietnam War) (Price, 2025), and environmental movements (including campaigns for ecological protection) extended the logic of activism across multiple spheres. These movements operated not only through traditional media but also via printed leaflets, posters, and alternative media outlets. From the beginning of the twenty-first century, the development of information and communication technologies ushered in a new phase: the transition to digital activism. Activists employ social media, blogs, platforms for collective action (such as online petitions), hashtags, and other tools (Treré & Kaun, 2021). This format enables faster mobilisation, broader audience reach, and the integration of local initiatives. For instance, the Zapatista movement in Mexico in 1998 used networked communications to coordinate international support and to establish the “People’s Global Action” (PGA) network in protest against the World Trade Organisation (Maison, 2022). Digital activism is characterised by several features: a lowered threshold for participation (allowing individuals to join without significant resource investment), rapid dissemination of messages through sharing mechanisms (reposts, hashtags), and the combination of emotional and visual content to attract attention (memes, infographics). At the same time, there are limitations: algorithmic visibility, censorship, and asymmetries in resources between activists and media or state actors (Kirk, 2024).

Overall, the development of activism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries demonstrates a gradual transformation from centralised movements focused on street protest to hybrid models in which offline and online actions interact. This evolution allows activist discourse to permeate social media, influence the information environment, and engage with media publishers, creating new pathways for shaping public opinion.

USA: Black Lives Matter movement. The protest movement that emerged in the USA under the banner of Black Lives Matter arose in response to systematic instances of police violence against African Americans and the lack of effective judicial mechanisms in such cases. Its inception in 2013 was linked to the acquittal in the case of the death of teenager Trayvon Martin, and it gained further momentum following the highly publicised deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and George Floyd (Francis & Wright-Rigueur, 2021). The movement focused attention on structural racism, discrimination, and unequal access to legal and social institutions. It rapidly evolved into a platform for articulating collective demands, encompassing not only police reform but broader issues of social equality. The movement’s mobilisation potential was strengthened through the use of digital communication channels, primarily social media, which facilitated wide visibility and the engagement of diverse population groups.

In the discourse of the Black Lives Matter movement in the USA, several slogans occupy a central position, serving as mobilising formulas and markers of the movement’s identity. The most well-known slogan, “Black Lives Matter”, initially emerged in response to instances of violent deaths of African Americans during police interventions. It asserts that “black lives matter” in a society where, historically and systematically, the value of these lives has been ignored or diminished. Scholarly studies emphasise that the slogan does not have a single interpretative meaning – its semantics vary according to the speaking context, audience, and media mediation (Hogan *et al.*, 2021). Another key slogan, “No Justice, No Peace”, functions as a demand: without justice, there can be no peace. It expresses a causal relationship, indicating that the absence of justice for victims of racial violence generates social tension and protest (Corrias, 2023). Both slogans are short, rhythmic, and easily repeatable, which facilitates memorability and dissemination. They operate as signals of group identity and solidarity among activists and supporters of the movement. The lack of complex syntactic structures enhances their universality and accessibility. Furthermore, the discourse frequently includes variations of these formulas or their combination with the names of victims of police violence (for example, “Black Lives Matter – George Floyd”) or with other protest-related phrases (for example, “I Can’t Breathe”) (Carney & Kelekay, 2022). Short slogans also serve as the core of metaphorical constructions that create symbolic dichotomies such as “us/them” and “justice/injustice”. Through the repetition of these formulas, the movement consolidates a

linguistic frame in which violence, discrimination, and racial injustice are presented as systemic phenomena rather than isolated incidents.

The visual components of the movement's protest discourse play a significant role in communicating meaning beyond language. One of the most prominent iconographic forms is the raised fist, often depicted in outline or solid form, associated with resistance, solidarity, and defiance. The raised fist, combined with a minimalist style and high contrast, frequently appears in posters, stencils, stickers, and murals. Colours also carry symbolic weight. The predominant use of black – representing African American identity and the historical experience of racial oppression – is often combined with bright accents of yellow or white to create contrast and enhance visibility. For example, in many murals and street posters in 2020, white text on a black background or a black silhouette with yellow lines was employed to maximise contrast and legibility (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Work by the collective Trust Your Struggle, Oakland, USA

Source: C. Jackson (2020)

Posters at street demonstrations often featured portraits of victims of police violence (for example, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Eric Garner), accompanied by slogans or hashtags (Fig. 3). In the case of memes on platforms such as Instagram (n.d.), simplified graphics or photomontages were used, emphasising the subject's face, a phrase, and an archival background. In urban spaces, graffiti and stencils featuring slogans or the movement's name appeared on building façades, fences, and bridges, effectively transforming the city into an open display of protest symbolism.



Figure 3. Portrait of Breonna Taylor on activists' posters

Source: D. Lovan (2020)

These visual elements serve multiple functions. Firstly, they provide immediate recognition of the movement within the visual field. Secondly, they act as an “easy entry point” for audiences who do not engage with or read lengthy texts. Thirdly, visual symbols can be replicated in digital spaces (screenshots, reposts, avatars), amplifying their informational impact. Social media has become a key communication platform for the movement. X (formerly Twitter) (n.d.) was one of the first channels for the mass dissemination of hashtag activism: the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has been used since 2013 to structure discussions, mark thematic threads, and centralise protest discourse. Analyses indicate that hashtag usage spiked on specific days associated with significant events, such as the announcements of police acquittals in the cases of Michael Brown or George Floyd (Bestvater *et al.*, 2023). Research covering 2014–2020 recorded tens of millions of tweets using hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter, #AllLivesMatter, and #BlueLivesMatter. Analytics showed that activists are more effective at mobilising short-term attention, whereas opposing or reactive accounts tend to exhibit more stable activity over time (Klein *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the study Black Lives Matter and the Evolving Role of Social Media notes that X (Twitter) functions as a new public sphere where discussions about race, policing, and racial justice take place (Dunivin *et al.*, 2022).

The portrayal of the protest movement in American national media significantly shaped how the broader public perceived its goals, tactics, and legitimacy. Traditional news outlets employed varied approaches to coverage: some emphasised civic solidarity and the largely peaceful nature of the demonstrations, while others focused on chaotic episodes, confrontations with police, and contentious moments during protests. This variation reflects editorial framing choices: certain publications sought to highlight the structural causes of mass mobilisation, whereas others concentrated on localised incidents, creating an impression of instability. In many cases, news stories were built around confrontational headlines and dramatic visual imagery, emphasising scenes of clashes or damage to private and public property (Palmer, 2021). Such an approach shifted attention away from the protesters' primary demands – investigations into deaths caused by police violence and the implementation of systemic law enforcement reforms – towards issues of public order and control. Rather than analysing the substance of activist demands, coverage often centred on official responses, calls to restore “peace” and “stability”, thereby projecting the institutional perspective and altering the balance between explaining the causes of the protests and presenting their consequences. In parallel, some publications emphasised the scale of the movement, the largely peaceful nature of most demonstrations, and the symbolic role of key slogans. Such coverage conveyed that the protests were not merely reactions to isolated incidents but also reflections of deeper social issues related to

racial inequality. Analytical articles paid greater attention to historical context, legal aspects, and participants' testimonies, providing a multidimensional picture of the protest process (Cox, 2022).

In the realm of political debate, the movement acted as a catalyst for discussions on police reform, including the introduction of bias training, the use of body-worn cameras, and the limitation of so-called no-knock warrants (executed without prior judicial authorisation) (Ray, 2022). This led to the emergence of legislative initiatives at the federal level, notably Bill of the United States Congress No. H.R.7120 (2020), demonstrating the transformation of protest discourse into formal political proposals. Moreover, the movement stimulated changes in data collection practices, political accountability, and the activation of local political actors. For example, it drew increased attention to racial disparities in criminal justice, education, and healthcare. In this sense, the movement functions not only as a protest force but also as an agent of change within policy and administrative practices. Another significant effect has been the international spread of the movement. The ideas, symbols, slogans, and strategic tactics of BLM have been imported and adapted in other countries – through changes in names, local hashtags, and contextual adaptations – in 2023, creating a multiplier effect in discursive influence (Strong *et al.*, 2023). Thus, the BLM movement in the USA demonstrates how discourse – through slogans, visual symbols, networked content, and media representation – can shape social perceptions, mobilise audiences, and drive tangible changes in political and legal spheres.

Brazil: Activism for women's rights. A key feature of the Brazilian women's movement is the use of short, rhythmic slogans that condense demands into easily comprehensible formulas. The central slogan, "Meu corpo, minhas regras" ("My body, my rules"), became widely recognisable during campaigns against restrictions on reproductive rights and in initiatives opposing violence against women. It articulates women's right to bodily autonomy and resists social and political control over female bodies. Other messages appearing in these protests include "Meu corpo não é público" ("My body is not public property"), "Liberdade para decidir" ("Freedom to decide"), and "Contra o machismo, estamos juntas" ("Against machismo, we stand together") (Loureiro, 2023). These slogans not only express political positions but also foster the formation of collective identity. A notable feature is the combination of general slogans with local narratives. Posters often included the names of victims of femicide or domestic violence, giving the demands a personalised dimension. By individualising these issues, the slogans acquire emotional and political resonance, extending beyond abstract notions of equality. Visual elements have become an integral part of mobilisation practices. Posters, banners, and street graffiti frequently employ shades of pink and purple (Fig. 4).



Figure 4. Annual women's rights march, 8 March 2023, Brazil

Source: M. Osava (2024)

In the Brazilian context, purple is associated with the fight against violence towards women, while pink is used to highlight messages and create visual contrast. This colour coding is easily recognisable by audiences and links to the international traditions of the feminist movement. Meme culture on Facebook also exerts a significant influence. As a form of digital protest artefact, memes are characterised by simple graphic solutions: silhouette images, photomontages, and concise text (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Popular Portuguese-language feminist meme

Note: Não dependo de um homem (I don't depend on a man); Me banco sozinha (I support myself); Sou empoderada (I'm empowered); Sou independente (I'm independent); Se morde macho, kk (Bite your elbows, mate, lol); Quer dividir a conta? (Fancy splitting the bill?); Pagar tudo é obrigação do homem!!!! (Paying for everything is a man's duty!!!!)

Source: Feminista (2025)

Within Brazilian activist circles, memes often mock patriarchal stereotypes, such as the notions that "a woman should remain silent" or "her place is at home". Transforming these narratives into a sarcastic form generates a sense of collective resistance. Such visual elements are circulated through reposts and comments, creating a digital space for critiquing machismo. Online platforms play a key role in mobilising and disseminating feminist discourse. In Brazil, Facebook is particularly significant, with activist groups functioning as coordination hubs. One notable example is the group Mulheres Unidas Contra Bolsonaro (n.d.)

(“Women United Against Bolsonaro”), which in 2018 launched the #EleNão campaign. The hashtag quickly spread and became a marker of protest mobilisation, engaging over a million users within a few days. Facebook groups are used not only to organise protests but also for internal training and the dissemination of safety instructions. They function as digital headquarters, where activists coordinate actions, share resources, and analyse informational content. Local activist blogs play an important role, publishing personal testimonies from women who have experienced violence or discrimination. These blogs create alternative archives of experience that are often absent from mainstream media. They serve as valuable sources of data for researchers and help foster horizontal networks of solidarity.

National media, notably the newspaper *Folha de S.Paulo* (n.d.), regularly cover women’s protest actions and debates on women’s rights. Publications include interviews with activists, reports on domestic violence, femicide, and public campaigns against discriminatory statements by politicians. However, a tension exists between mainstream media and alternative platforms: large editorial outlets often present events as short news items, emphasising conflictual elements, whereas blogs and independent publications provide more context and depth (Carvalho, 2025). Mainstream media frequently reduce complex demands to a few quotations or dramatic images, which risks delegitimising the movement. In contrast, alternative platforms, including independent women’s collectives, seek to fill these gaps by offering a more systematic analysis. This divide between different communication channels creates a two-layered media space: on one side, major news brands; on the other, a network of activist resources.

Women’s activism in Brazil has produced tangible social effects. Firstly, the institutional visibility of gender inequality issues has increased. Under the pressure of protest campaigns, political parties were compelled to integrate gender equality into their agendas. The #EleNão campaign influenced the public agenda by demonstrating the scale of women’s mobilisation and its capacity to affect electoral processes (Fagundes-Ausani, 2025). Secondly, activism fostered the creation of horizontal networks of solidarity among women from diverse social and ethnic groups. An example is the *Marcha das Margaridas* (n.d.), which unites women farmers and highlights issues of agrarian justice, food security, and rural women’s rights. This movement combines feminist demands with class and socio-economic concerns, producing an intersectional form of activism. In several municipalities, public initiatives led to the adoption of policies supporting women, including funding for shelters, the development of psychological support services, and educational programmes on gender equality. These developments indicate that activist discourse can translate into concrete political measures.

Turkey: Protests in Gezi Park. The protests in Gezi Park, Istanbul, during the summer of 2013 began as a local initiative to protect green spaces and urban areas from

planned development. They soon evolved into a largescale socio-political movement, as the issue of preserving public space gained broader significance within debates on citizens’ right to the city and participation in decision-making processes (Farro & Demirhisar, 2014). The mobilisation of diverse social groups was driven by dissatisfaction with government policies, particularly the tightening control over the media, restrictions on freedom of expression, and interference in citizens’ daily lives. A notable feature of the protests was interclass and intergenerational interaction, reflected in the creation of horizontal networks of cooperation among participants (Taştan, 2013). The protests also responded to the increasing use of force by the police to disperse peaceful gatherings, sparking debates on the limits of legitimacy for state institutions. The events in Gezi demonstrated a shift from a local environmental issue to a multidimensional movement that intertwined urban development, civil liberties, and democratic participation. In this context, Gezi Park became not only a physical site of conflict but also a symbol of broader societal mobilisation.

One of the most recognised slogans during the Gezi Park protests was “Her yer Taksim, her yer direniş” (Turkish: “Everywhere Taksim, everywhere resistance”). Originating in Istanbul, it quickly spread throughout Turkey, symbolising that the protest was not confined to the geographic space of the park but metaphorically extended across the country’s public sphere. In this sense, the slogan conveyed the idea that all of Taksim – as the epicentre of protest – could exist everywhere if the spirit of resistance was mobilised (Gruber, 2017). Additionally, protesters actively employed humour, irony, and satire as elements of strategic resistance. For example, protesters interpreted images of penguins in the Turkish media as a symbol of censorship – when a national television channel broadcast a documentary about penguins instead of reporting on events in Gezi Park, protesters declared “we are the penguins”, emphasising the absurdity of the authorities’ information nihilism (Fig. 6).



Figure 6. Satirical graffiti of a penguin wearing a gas mask, symbolising the protesters

Source: Occupy Gezi Images... (2013)

Other humorous elements included parodies of websites or brands with altered names; for instance, the popular marketplace site *sahibinden.com* was satirically

transformed into *tayyibinden.com* (a wordplay on President Erdoğan's name) (Sabral & Erdim, 2013). Such slogans and humour served a dual purpose: combining mobilising power with a discursive challenge to authority through parody, where sarcasm and symbolism became forms of political expression. In confrontations, visual representation became a central element of protest discourse. YouTube videos and photographs from the scene documented direct clashes, blockades, activist speeches, and the use of tear gas (Bosphorus Jazz Choir at Gezi Park, 2013; The new Gezi Park..., 2014; This is life after Gezi..., 2014). These recordings were subsequently shared online as evidence of resistance and a strategic record of the confrontations. Analyses of video activism during Gezi note that participants used smartphones, handheld cameras, and drones to produce footage that contrasted sharply with official media coverage (Doganay & Kara, 2025). Photographs from the protest scenes – clashes with police, street blockades, and the occupation of temporary protest camps – served as visual documentation that could be disseminated through both local and international media.

In addition, cartoons and graffiti became a form of localised discursive resistance. Images of politicians' faces, distorted portraits, graphic parodies, and slogans appeared on city walls and in periodicals (Fig. 7). These visuals often combined ironic text with protest symbols, such as stylised fists or masked faces. Street art functioned as a visual form of protest expression, conveying messages beyond the immediate site of the events.



Figure 7. Cover pages of satirical publications, “Museum of the Revolution”, Istanbul, 2013

Source: C. Altay (2013)

The image shows a wall displaying covers of satirical magazines exhibited in a temporary “Museum of the Revolution” during the Istanbul protests. Caricatures of political figures, including Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, operated as a form of visual resistance, employing irony and exaggeration to delegitimise authority. This mode of protest combined humour with a critique of state decisions, creating an alternative space for political expression. The presence of these magazines in the public sphere of the protests demonstrates how popular culture and media satire were integrated into the discourse of civic resistance. Such visual materials helped shape an alternative political field, circulating both in the physical urban environment

and online through reposts, screenshots, and archival collections. Thus, visual codes functioned as markers of collective identity and served as a means of rapidly conveying protest meanings in public spaces. They structured audience attention through recurring symbols, colour schemes, and recognisable graphic motifs, endowing protest messages with visual consistency and reproducibility. Moreover, these codes enhanced the mobilisation effect, allowing participants to position themselves as part of a broader movement, regardless of their geographical or social background. Visual elements also helped overcome informational barriers, acting as an alternative communication channel when media coverage was limited.

X (Twitter) (n.d.) emerged as a key communication channel during the Gezi Park protests. Analysts recorded that participants actively tweeted information about protest locations, movements of security forces, alerts, and safety advice. Studies note that, due to the lack of independent media coverage in Turkey, protesters themselves broadcast news via X (Twitter) and live-streaming of events (Barbera & Metzger, 2013). Researchers analysed over 54 million tweets related to Gezi Park to trace themes, temporal dynamics, and network connections among users (Ozturkcan *et al.*, 2017). This analysis revealed which messages mobilised participants, how the activists' communication infrastructure developed, and how information was exchanged across regions. In this context, X (Twitter) not only transmitted information but also became a symbolic part of the protest itself – a kind of digital public space. YouTube also played a significant role. The protests became visible to an international audience through videos showing the harsh suppression of demonstrations by security forces or scenes of mass resistance. Video documentation served as a tool to challenge the official discourse: activists uploaded reports, interviews, and footage of clashes to extend the narrative beyond the domestic media sphere (Doganay & Kara, 2025). These live-streamed videos and archival recordings increased the visibility of the protests and became a media resource for analysis, evaluation, and memetic use.

During the Gezi Park protests, notable differences in tone were observed between state-aligned or pro-government media and independent or alternative outlets (Oz, 2016). Some leading media in Turkey largely ignored the events or presented them as a localised conflict, downplaying their scale or emphasising “disorder”. As a result, protesters and the public were critical of the incomplete coverage. In contrast, alternative portals, bloggers, and online publications documented instances of force, arrests, and citizen testimonies. Many participants considered traditional media unreliable due to censorship or biased reporting, relying instead on alternative communication channels. Moreover, authorities employed strategies of censorship and counter-discourse: journalists were arrested, live streams blocked, and pressure exerted on media organisations. In some cases, state prosecutors petitioned courts to determine which television channels or online platforms

were broadcasting protest “propaganda” (Turkish prosecutors..., 2025). As a result, Turkey’s media landscape in the context of Gezi was highly fragmented: official channels sought to neutralise or marginalise the protest discourse, while independent and digital platforms functioned as signalling networks for the dissemination of information.

One of the key outcomes of the Gezi protests was the emergence of new civic movements and the strengthening of citizen activism. Following the events in the park, environmental initiatives, urban movements for the preservation of public spaces, campaigns against urban redevelopment, and efforts to protect freedom of expression and reduce police brutality gained momentum (Acar & Uluğ, 2025). The Gezi protest acted as a catalyst for the formation of local groups, which subsequently operated in their own neighbourhoods based on the logic of protest. The protest discourse also influenced the political consciousness of young people (Kirişci, 2013). Many participants in Gezi had limited prior experience in political organisation. The protests served as practical training in mobilisation, communication, and strategic thinking,

leading to a noticeable increase in youth participation in subsequent elections, civic initiatives, and activist campaigns across various cities in Turkey (Uzun, 2019). Moreover, the energy of the Gezi protests continued to impact cultural practices, including music, art, street culture, and the blogosphere. Song lyrics, visual artworks, and poems created in the context of the protests became enduring symbols of the movement’s memory and legacy.

Integrated strategies of protest movements. In the protest movements of the USA, Brazil, and Turkey, there was a notable interaction between linguistic formulas, visual representations, digital communication channels, and media interpretations, which established the logic of collective mobilisation (Table 1). The combination of these elements created an integrated system in which each component reinforced the others: slogans provided the semantic core of the protest, visual symbols made it recognisable, digital platforms ensured rapid circulation of content, and media discourse shaped public perception of the movements.

Table 1. Comparison of protest strategies in the USA, Brazil, and Turkey

Parameter	USA (BLM)	Brazil (Women’s Activism)	Turkey (Gezi Park)
Linguistic strategies	Short slogans (“Black Lives Matter”, “No Justice, No Peace”); personalisation through victims’ names	Concise slogans (“Meu corpo, minhas regras”); names of femicide victims	Slogans of territorial solidarity (“Her yer Taksim, her yer direniş”)
Visual codes	Fist of resistance; portraits of victims; high-contrast compositions	Purple-pink palettes; personalised posters; memes	Humour, caricatures, penguins; satirical magazines; graffiti
Digital platforms	X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube	Facebook groups, blogs, meme platforms	X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, livestreams, smartphone videos
Media interaction	Polarisation between support and criticism; varied framing	Gap between mainstream and alternative media	Open censorship, broadcast restrictions, alternative event archives
Collective identity	Solidarity around structural racial injustice	Solidarity among women of diverse groups against gender-based violence	Solidarity of “urban citizens” for freedom of space and expression
Social outcomes	Police reforms, reframing of racial inequality discourse, global diffusion	Changes in political agendas, local women-support policies, #EleNão	Urban movements, youth mobilisation, transformation of cultural practices
Type of strategy interaction	Mutual reinforcement of linguistic and visual symbols via digital networks	Visual-emotional codes + Facebook-based mobilisation	Humour + visual codes + digital protest archive in response to media censorship

Source: created by the authors

Linguistic strategies established the primary interpretive frameworks for events. Short, rhythmic, and emotionally charged formulas not only condensed key demands but also served a unifying function: their repetition reinforced a shared semantic space within which participants identified themselves. Visual codes – such as colour schemes, symbols of resistance, graffiti, or portraits of victims – transformed protest into a recognisable public practice and added an emotional dimension that could not be conveyed through words alone. Digital platforms acted as arenas for rapid mobilisation and alternative sources of information, allowing movements to disseminate their own interpretations of events. Through social media, protest symbols circulated on a global scale, creating a multiplier effect: local movements achieved transnational visibility, and their slogans and visual formulas became part of a global protest

lexicon. Media, in turn, shaped external perceptions of the protests: depending on editorial policy, movements could be represented as legitimate civic initiatives or as sources of conflict, influencing public support and the subsequent course of events. Collectively, these strategies enabled the construction of a collective identity in which participants perceived themselves as part of broader transformational processes. The integration of linguistic, visual, digital, and media mechanisms allowed protests to move from local incidents to wider social change, impacting legislative initiatives, public discourse, and cultural practices.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrated that slogans functioned not only as a tool for mobilisation but also as a mechanism for structuring the public discourse of protests. The study by

G.M. Sainz & A. Hanna (2023) showed that Fridays for Future employed concise formulas such as “There is no Planet B”, which combined informational content with an emotional impetus. Comparisons indicated that, although the subject matter of the slogans differed – climate issues versus structural racism – the logic of their use was similar: they created an educational effect while simultaneously prompting action. In the case of BLM, the focus was on issues of safety and justice, whereas the climate movement emphasised long-term environmental responsibility. This suggests that slogans possess a universal character as a communicative technology of protest, yet acquire specific significance depending on social context and audience. The study also revealed that visual resources in protest movements served to amplify the impact of slogans and enhance their recognisability. Y. Wang & G. Tavmen (2025), in their research on the Chinese movement #SeeFemaleWorkers, similarly highlighted the importance of visual symbolism, where imagery underscored female presence in the workforce. Comparative analysis indicated that in China, images were more codified and cautious due to state oversight, whereas in Brazil and the USA, they circulated freely and achieved prominent public resonance. This demonstrated that visual resources functioned not merely as communication tools but also as spaces for negotiating state-imposed constraints: in more open media environments, they became central elements of protest aesthetics, whereas under controlled regimes, they remained more hidden and symbolically cautious. Particular attention in the findings was drawn to the use of humour and irony as forms of resistance. A similar logic was observed in P. Pain’s (2020) analysis, where digital feminist activism in India employed irony and personal narratives to transform private stories into a collective protest discourse. In both cases, humour acted as a mediator between the personal and the public, creating a symbolic space in which authority was stripped of its aura of inviolability. In Turkey, humour tended to be collective and street-based, whereas in India it emphasised personalised narratives. These differences indicate that irony constitutes a universal strategy of resistance, though its expression varies – from individual stories in digital environments to collective satirical gestures in urban spaces.

The findings also highlighted the significant role of digital platforms, which served as essential infrastructures for protest. This aligns with the conclusions of S.J. Vachhani (2024), who demonstrated that networked platforms generate new forms of interdependence and vulnerability that can be mobilised as resources. In the Gezi and BLM protests, digital media facilitated horizontal communication and rapid information exchange, whereas in feminist networks in China and Brazil, they additionally provided functions of safety and support. This indicated that digital environments constitute multifunctional spaces: simultaneously channels for information, platforms for learning, and arenas for solidarity. The analysis showed that hashtags functioned not merely as tools for marking discussions but also as crucial mechanisms for integrating online and

offline actions. In Poland, #BlackProtest evolved from a digital space into the streets and then back into the online sphere. A. Nacher (2020) emphasised that such hashtags possess narrative potential, enabling protest movements to construct a collective story that unites individual experiences. Comparative research revealed a shared logic in the use of hashtags as “digital flags”; however, in the USA and Brazil, they spread rapidly on a global scale, whereas in Poland, they remained more localised. This confirmed that the scope of dissemination was directly dependent on access to international media infrastructure and on whether the issues addressed had a universal resonance or remained confined within national boundaries.

The findings also demonstrated that digital activism can translate into tangible change, extending beyond symbolic practices. Similar conclusions were drawn by Y. Li *et al.* (2021), who studied the Sleeping Giants movement and showed that digital activism is effective when it can combine online actions with offline outcomes, particularly in the realm of economic pressure. Although the mechanisms of influence differed across these cases – from boycotts to reforms and local initiatives – the success in both instances depended on the capacity to integrate digital protest into real socio-political structures. The findings indicated that digital environments are employed not only by progressive movements but also by right-wing political forces. For instance, in Latin America, women’s movements mobilised solidarity through digital networks, whereas right-wing movements, as noted by T. Gold & A.M. Peña (2021), developed their own strategies of digital mediation to advance conservative ideas. This demonstrates that digital spaces are not monopolised by a single political force; rather, they serve as a universal tool for all forms of activism. The differences lay in tactics: women’s movements emphasised the creation of horizontal networks, while right-wing movements relied on strategies to build vertical media chains. This underscores that the digital ecosystem functions as an open arena for competition among diverse ideological projects. A key feature of these protests was the significance of allyship and intergroup solidarity. Similar observations were made by S. Jolly *et al.* (2021), who studied allyship in sports, where alliances facilitated the promotion of social change. Comparisons revealed that, although the contexts differed – political protests in the USA versus global sports – the underlying logic was the same: allies helped broaden the discourse and increase its visibility. This suggests that allyship is a universal resource for activism, capable of sustaining long-term support for movements and fostering multi-voiced coalitions.

The results also demonstrated that in the USA, Brazil, and Turkey, digital campaigns were not limited to symbolic gestures but produced tangible outcomes, ranging from legislative reforms to the emergence of new movements. N. Madison & M. Klang (2020) also argued that digital activism possesses significant potential that should not be underestimated. A comparison of their findings with the results of this study indicates that examples from

different regions support this claim: even when initial actions appeared as simple “clicks” or the sharing of a post, they could develop into substantial social processes. This reflects a transformation in the nature of political participation in the twentyfirst century, where digital gestures often constitute the first step towards broader structural change. The study demonstrated that activism in the USA, Brazil, and Turkey unfolded in diverse contexts yet shared common features: the use of slogans, visual symbols, digital networks, and forms of allyship. Comparisons with other research confirmed that these elements recur across different regions and thematic areas, although they vary in scale, content, and political constraints. This underscores the universality of key activist strategies while also highlighting their adaptability to specific circumstances.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the research established that activist discourse functions as a multi-level instrument of social mobilisation, combining linguistic formulas, visual symbols, digital platforms, and media representation. Analysis revealed that while protest practices take distinct forms in the USA, Brazil, and Turkey, they maintain a shared logic in employing communicative strategies to construct collective identity and influence social change. The findings of the study confirmed that slogans constitute a key element of protest discourse. Slogans functioned as universal mobilisation tools, enabling complex social demands to be condensed into accessible and rhythmic phrases. In the USA, the raised fist symbol and contrasting colour schemes facilitated rapid recognition of the movement. In Brazil, the pink and purple colour code emphasised the feminist character of the actions and their focus on combating violence against women. In Turkey, caricatures and graffiti became a discursive form of resistance, combining humour with critique of authority. The study also confirmed the decisive role of digital platforms in shaping activist discourse. In the USA, X (Twitter) was used to centralise discussions and structure information flows; in Turkey, it compensated for the lack of independent media coverage and provided a means of circumventing censorship; in Brazil, Facebook groups acted as digital command centres for coordinating protests and disseminating safety instructions. It was established that

media coverage of protests significantly influences public perceptions of their legitimacy.

Protests in the USA, Brazil, and Turkey demonstrated that the combination of linguistic formulas, visual codes, and digital channels can transform local conflicts into large-scale processes of social mobilisation. In the USA, this was reflected in political shifts related to reforms of police accountability practices; in Brazil, in increased institutional attention to gender-based violence and the formation of horizontal networks of women's solidarity; and in Turkey, in the rise of youth civic engagement and the emergence of local movements that continued the logic of Gezi after the protests ended. The cumulative effects demonstrated the capacity of protest movements to generate long-term social change through the integration of diverse communicative strategies.

At the same time, the study had certain limitations. Firstly, the analysis focused primarily on three countries, highlighting the need to expand the geographical scope for a more comprehensive comparison of protest practices. Secondly, quantitative indicators in the realm of digital activism – such as data on audience reach and the dynamics of hashtag circulation – relied on publicly available statistics, which do not always provide a complete picture of information flows. Further research in this area should focus on quantitative analyses of the interaction between online and offline activism, as well as the long-term effects of protest movements on political culture and institutional change. A promising avenue is the comparison of activist practices under democratic and authoritarian regimes, which would reveal the role of structural constraints in shaping discursive strategies. It is also important to study the cross-cultural transfer of protest symbols and tactics, as this would help to understand how local movements acquire a global dimension.

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