Positive or negative communication in social activism

Comunicar en positivo o negativo en el activismo social

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the role of communication in social activism from models that surpass the mere emotional reaction, prior belief reinforcement or brand identification. This paper tests the hypothesis that a message focused on the cause (and its results) will motivate a previously sensitized audience depending on their interactions with source favorability. The methodology is based on the design of a bifactor experimental action result study 2 (failure versus success) x 2 valences (favorable versus unfavorable source) with the participation of 297 people who are pro-avoidance of evictions. The results allow us to infer that the messages from sources hostile to the cause that report negative results have the potential to emotionally and behaviorally motivate activists to a greater extent than messages with more positive results from favorable sources. The conclusions point to the dialogue between social injustice frames and pro-cause action emotions as a way to increase social mobilization. The theoretical and empirical implications of these findings are discussed in the present-day context of social media prevalence.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación analiza el papel de la comunicación en el activismo social desde modelos que superen la mera reacción emocional, el refuerzo de creencias previas o la identificación con la marca. Este estudio pone a prueba la hipótesis de que un mensaje que centre la atención en la causa (en sus resultados) motivará a una audiencia previamente sensibilizada en favor de dicha causa cuando interactúe con la favorabilidad de la fuente. Se ha diseñado un estudio experimental bifactorial 2 resultado de la acción (fracaso versus éxito) x 2 valencia (fuente favorable versus fuente desfavorable) con la participación de 297 personas pro-evitación de desahucios. Los resultados permiten deducir que los mensajes emitidos por fuentes hostiles para la causa que informen de resultados negativos tienen el potencial de motivar afectiva y conductualmente a los activistas en mayor medida que mensajes con resultados más positivos en fuentes favorables. Las conclusiones finales señalan al diálogo entre marcos discursivos de injusticia social y emociones de acción pro-causa como vía para incrementar la movilización social. Se discuten las implicaciones teórico-prácticas de estos resultados en el contexto actual de predominio de redes sociales.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Communication, activism, engagement, social change, efficacy, persuasion, social motivation, reception.
Comunicación, activismo, compromiso, cambio social, eficacia, persuasión, motivación social, recepción.

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1. Introduction and state of the art

This empirical research analyzes one of the most pressing questions in forums and publications engaged in communication for social change: How can communication aimed at citizen involvement in social transformation be more effective? (Kirk, 2012; Waisbord, 2015). The activism promoted by social media that induces users to click while on their social networks (Fatkin & Lansdown, 2015), or to make a donation (Nos-Aldás & Pinazo, 2013) is insufficient to bring about social change. Communication strategies aimed at motivating active responses to a social cause require formats that focus on the cause and motivate people to defend it. Participation in pro-cause behaviors seems to go no further than activity in open communication spaces, such as the digital (Sampedro & Martínez-Avidad, 2018), or for the audience to listen only to what they want to hear (Hart, Albarracín, Eagly, Brechan, Lindberg, & Merrill, 2009; Nisbet, Hart, Myers, & Ellithorpe, 2013; Stroud, 2007; Webster & Ksiazek, 2012). Willing recipients of the message are not necessarily active even though they may be defenders of the cause. Exposing oneself to messages that fit prior attitudes and avoiding those that challenge their values can lead to a kind of inactive conformity, summed up as, "that's the way things are".

Social media facilitate the widespread dissemination of social causes that represent online what social networks do offline (Bakker & de-Vreese, 2011; Boulianne, 2009; Dimitrova, Shedata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014). This feature of online communication can enable the messages from these closed self-confirming circles to be broadcast widely and to raise political awareness (Boulianne, 2009; Sampedro & Martínez-Avidad, 2018). In this new context, activating the social commitment of those already converted to the cause but insufficiently active, could depend on where the recipient's attention lies when receiving the message. What is the best communication strategy for activating this type of audience? People tend to act with greater intensity and commitment when they feel their participation could be useful or necessary —e.g. when the cause is under threat. This research aims to explore aspects of communication that could intensify social motivation towards the cause among recipients who are already sensitized in that direction.

1.1. Sensitization towards social justice issues

To be socially sensitized is to feel affected, to judge, to think and act in accordance with social-moral values in a coherent way (Haidt, 2001; 2003). This implies an affective and cognitive rejection response towards the perception of moral breakdown resulting from a social action (Haidt, 2003). This does not necessarily result in immediate action, but rather a greater predisposition towards acting in favor of a social cause that motivates the person. The subsequent moral judgement entails evaluating the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the social act that defends the cause, a judgement based on a cognitive-emotional process that is predisposed towards the action (Haidt, 2007). The judgement arises from a communication scenario that should be able to motivate action and commitment. What aspects of the communication structure can stimulate a motivating social-moral judgment that will better predispose someone to act in favor of the cause?

To keep motivation alive, activists need to be sensitized to content that can rouse them to defend the cause beyond merely sending in a donation or feeling comfortable with the brand (De-Andrés, Nos-Aldás, & García-Matilla, 2016; Nos-Aldás & Pinazo, 2013; Pinazo & Nos-Aldás, 2016; Pinazo, Barros-Loscertales, Peris, Ventura-Campos, & Avila, 2012). Activists who ultimately take up the cause will be those who are motivated to follow up the conclusions of the message in favor of the cause, if these are deemed relevant for the defense of their values. The difficulty with those converted to the cause, is that they probably feel they are already active, and perhaps the message no longer moves them to make an effective commitment to specific actions. In this sense, the arguments' valence could be particularly relevant for social activism in terms of their capacity to motivate. Content that describes the success of the social action (positive valence) or failure (negative valence) can affect motivation to act in favor of the message in different ways. Activists in favor of social causes will tend to search for messages that validate their position. In this sense, they can expect to receive a call to action through negative or positive valence messages from a favorable outlet. If the cause is not under threat, it is only necessary to remain convinced of the value of such messages; however, the need to defend a cause under threat can motivate action, regardless of the source of this information. The consideration of the social action's outcome as a

persuasive argument has not been widely researched (Reysen & Hackett, 2016; Reysen & Katzarska-Miller, 2013), neither has the interaction between the social action and the source.

1.2. When the source is unexpected

In terms of social sensitization, the recipient is the essential element in the communication process, not for their passivity but for their influence on how that communication is framed, given that it is the recipient who will shape the meaning of the message. The recipient can and should attend to the message actively. Studies on selective exposure seem to suggest that the response to a message is conditioned by the extent of the recipient's engagement with the cause defended, and they essentially relate this exposure to the source of the message (Arceneaux & Johnson, 2015; Briñol, Petty, & Tormala, 2004; Chaffee & Miyo, 1983; Ehrenberg, 2000; Freedman & Sear, 1965).

A source that is confirmatory of the recipient's prior position, sensitizes them to the cause to a lesser extent, as the message is expected to confirm prior beliefs; such trust shifts focus away from other potentially dissonant information (Briñol & Petty, 2015) although it could polarize the political position (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Cryderman, 2013). Commercial communication uses these information reception preferences to associate social causes to brands in order to boost their image (Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Pinazo, Peris, Ramos, & Brotons, 2013); this communication strategy does not boost motivation for the cause itself.

> This research expands the tools demanded by the global social justice community and reinforces the proposals of communication for social change on the transformative, educational and mobilizing effectiveness of communicative strategies that go beyond emotional reaction or identification with the brand.

In short, evidence shows that the motivation to attend to a message favoring a social cause increases in the presence of a consonant source and can burnish the image of the neutral source (commercial brand). But what happens if someone is exposed to a message that is consistent with his or her social sensibility but comes from a dissonant source? We have found no studies that analyze the effect of a message from a disruptive source on sensitization to a social cause, expressed as an active response (cognitive, affective or behavioral) in favor of social causes.

1.3. Valence of the argument and the source

Possessing attitudes is not enough to influence behavior. People need to believe that their attitudes are correct and feel comfortable with them (Briñol & Petty, 2015). For activists, receiving information on a positive outcome about their advocated social action, can strongly reinforce their position. However, a negative outcome could be seen as a weak argument for the efficacy of the social action. Information containing a positive outcome of the social action can arouse good feelings about their position, thus requiring no further reinforcement. Such information could reduce motivation for action while the weak argument could have the opposite effect.

The credibility of the source interacts with the effect of the argument's valence. Related research on the area shows that when the message contains strong arguments, the highly credible source fosters prior attitudes more than when the source is barely credible; however, this effect is reversed when the arguments presented are weak (Briñol & Petty, 2015). If the argument is weak, it could contradict what the reader expects to receive and undermine confirmation that the action is effective. If the source offers arguments consistent with the person's values, this person will be more inclined to agree with the message, for they will reason that "if the message fits with me and my values, it must be good" (Briñol & Petty, 2015). If one receives information about the effectiveness of the action, it can then be interpreted that there is

no need for further action. A failure of the pro-cause action could rouse an individual to defend it, but if the source is pro-attitude, it could diminish their motivation, as it could be interpreted that the reason why they are reporting a setback is not because it is real but because they want to rouse people to action. Yet a source that is barely credible in its coverage in favor of the cause could boost activist motivation to defend it, as the action could end in failure, perhaps due to the fact that the source is controlled by media hostile to the cause. No research exists dealing directly with this combination of factors in recipients differentiated by the extent of their partiality to a social cause. The communication model presented by Pinazo and Nos-Aldás (2016) suggests that motivation in favor of a cause is modulated by a communication strategy associated to the context in which the message is presented. A context that is negative to the cause in a pro-attitude medium can arouse motivation favorable to the medium, not to the cause.

> The results of this study show that positive or negative messages focusing on success or failure (in terms of social psychology and, the message's positive or negative valence) are important for keeping activists in protest mode.

The aim of this work is to assess whether the context of interaction in political activism, as well as the source and valence of the result of the action influence pro-cause motivation. Specifically, we defend the hypothesis that presenting a group of pro-cause activists with a nega-tive valence message from a source hostile to their attitudes will motivate them more in favor of the cause than presenting them with a negative valence message from a pro-attitude source. Likewise, positive valence messages will have no differentiated effects on pro-cause motivation regardless of the attitude towards the cause of the medium that publishes it.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The study participants were individuals who fulfilled the following criteria: 1) to be committed to social causes; 2) to have participated in pro-avoidance of evictions mobilizations. Initially, 400 booklets were distributed, of which 24 were discarded for not having been entirely completed. A further 79 people were eliminated from the sample for not having taken part in any initiative demanding justice for those threatened by eviction (demonstrations, strikes, petition drives, filing complaints, use of social media or other types of action aimed at defending the cause of preventing evictions). This was the final distribution by conditions: failure/favorable source (70 individuals), failure/unfavorable source (83), success/favorable source (81) and success/unfavorable source (63). The final sample consisted of 297 individuals. Men accounted for 37.4% of the sample (N=111), women 62.6% (N=186). The age range was 18 to 70 (M=34.23; SD=13.91). Level of education was classified as those without a college degree, 56.2% (N=167), and those with a college degree, 43.8% (N=130). Of the total sample, 34.7% (N=103) held wage-earning employment while 65.3% (N=194) were unemployed. Monthly income was measured on a scale of 1 to 8: no income (1), less than or equal to 300€ (2), 301€ to 600€ (3), 601€ to 1,000€ (4), 1,001€ to 2,000€ (5), 2,001€ to 3,000€ (6), 3,001€ to 5,000€ (7), more than 5,000€ (8). The mean monthly income of those surveyed was between 301€ and 600€.

2.2. Study design and procedure

We performed a bifactor experimental action result study 2 (negative versus positive) x 2 sources (favorable versus unfavorable). A fictitious eviction case in the format of a news item was created then reviewed by a panel of experts in journalism, advertising, sociology, semiotics and social psychology. With the body of the message approved, the experimental conditions for the study were created[1].

The booklets containing the conditions of the experiment were distributed personally by research assistants to those individuals selected to take part in the survey. First, the participants were asked to

provide demographic data (gender, age, education, employment, income) then quantify the extent of their participation in demanding social justice for those affected by evictions. Later, on a separate sheet, each participant read the single news item on an eviction case drafted according to one of the four experimental conditions; on the next page, the participants responded to a series of questions related to the news item.

2.3. Dependent variables

Moral motivation (MM): the same items as in Pinazo and Nos-Aldás (2016) were used to measure moral judgement or the extent to which the action in the news report transgresses norms of social or ethical justice. The respondents had to answer two questions: "do you consider what has happened to this family socially unjust?", and, "do you consider it immoral to do nothing to prevent this situation?" Both items had a high internal consistency (α=.798; M=7.47; SD=2.06).

Affective motivation (AM): a version of the items selected from the PANAS-X scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) were used, but instead of applying an approach to the effect in two dimensions, one negative and one positive, we opted for items in line with the study objective to assess that affective state (Lambert, Eadeh, Peak, Scherer, Schott, & Slochower, 2014). Two affective motivator states were considered in relation to social activism: 1) the affective state that drives the activist to action; 2) the affective state associated to the rejection of the situation. Items were selected that better represented these states, based on PANAS. For affective motivation for action (AMA), the states selected were "Energetic", "Enthusiastic", "Inspired" and "Active" (α=.800; M=4.54; SD=1.65), and to represent affective motivation for rejection (AMR) the states chosen were "Hostile", "Irritable", "Anxious" and "Angry" (α=.805; M=5.07; SD=1.83).

Pro-conduct motivation (PcM): this assessed their predisposition to collaborate in just causes, and consisted of a set of three behaviors related to social activism: "collaborate in protest actions", "invest my money in ethical banks that do not pay interest and invest only in companies that favor just causes", "report companies that attempt to deceive customers, or act unjustly to make a profit". On a scale of 1 (I totally disagree) to 9 (I totally agree), participants were questioned on an eviction demanded by a bank: "what would you be willing to do to participate in a solution to this problem?" Given that the internal consistency of the three items is high, α=.711, we created an aggregate variable that assessed predisposition to act in favor of social causes (M=6.73; SD=1.83).

2.4. Control variable

Message credibility: the control variable to assess whether the recipient has understood the message. The effect of a message depends on the recipient's motivation to process it, according to certain models of persuasion, especially the one relating to elaboration likelihood (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). As a credibility factor, belief in news veracity was evaluated, based on two questions: 1) "this news item has been manipulated"; 2) "this news item is false" (α=.565). The aggregate measure of news credibility was M=3.97 (SD=2.44). A high score indicates that the participants do not trust the news item.

3. Results

The SPSS v24 statistical software package was used to analyze the data. Before studying the effect of the experimental conditions on the dependent variables, several analyses were run to evaluate possible bias in the demographic variables and in the motivation to elaborate the message. The results showed that the sample was evenly distributed according to the various conditions considered for the experiment: the gender proportion in each experimental condition is similar (χ^2=1.62; p=.656), as is the distribution for education level (χ^2=0.99; p=.805) and for being in or out of work (χ^2=0.99; p=.092). ANOVA for age (F=0.57; p=.634) and income (F=1.72; p=.163) indicates that these variables are also evenly distributed across the experimental conditions.

A univariate analysis of variance (UNIANOVA) was conducted to assess whether the recipients reacted in different ways to the message, in each of the conditions, perceiving it to be either true or false; results showed that different reactions did occur (F=5.513; p=.001; η^2=.053). The Tukey post-hoc means comparison test was used to reveal differences between various pairs. There were differences (p=.027) between news of success versus unfavorable source (M=4.62; SD=2.19) in relation

to news of failure versus unfavorable source (M=3.50; SD=2.40). There were also differences (p=.018) between news of success versus favorable source (M=4.49; SD=2.34) in relation to news of failure versus favorable source (M=3.35; SD=2.40). There were differences (p=.013) between news of success versus unfavorable source (M=4.62; SD=2.66) in relation to news of failure versus favorable source (M=3.35; SD=2.40). Finally, there were differences (p=.040) between news of failure versus unfavorable source (M=3.50; SD=2.19) in relation to news of success versus favorable source (M=4.49; SD=2.34). These paired differences indicate that the recipients regarded news publicizing the success of the cause as less credible, which shows a predisposition towards an expectation of failure. There was also a tendency of disbelief towards news from the unfavorable source. These differences are expected in people who are favorable to the social cause, demonstrating that the participants had read and understood the cases involved. With confidence in the participants' attention to the study, we assessed the effect of the cases on recipients' motivation towards the social cause.

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare the effect of the interaction of the Result (positive or negative) of the social action versus Source on motivational results (Moral Motivation, Affective Motivation and Motivation for Action). Some indicators showed that the MANOVA statistical assumptions were fulfilled. Box's M test =69.128, p<.000 showed that the homoscedasticity of the covariance matrices was not in question; consequently, the interpretation of the multivariate test could be made with Pillai's Trace (Tabachnick, Fidell, & Ullman, 2007). Levene's test for equality of variances is not significant for the Pro-Conduct Motivation and Affective Motivation variables; therefore, the Tukey test was applied to these variables during post-hoc analysis. On the other hand, Levene's test was significant, which indicated a lack of homogeneity in the sample variances, in the Moral Motivation and Motivation to Reject variables. Thus, Dunnett's C test was used in the post-hoc analysis of these variables.

The MANOVA results for motivation revealed a significant principal effect, the Pillai Trace =.269 (F=7.191; =.000), with a small sample of the effect (η^2=.090). The univariate test showed significant effects in the direction expected for the effects of motivation (Table 1).

Table 1. Results of the interaction between result of the action vs. source on pro-cause motivation						
	Mean	DT	F	GI	p	η²
Moral motivation (MM)			9.238	3	<.000	.086
Success vs. unfavorable source (n=63)	7.68	1.81				
Failure vs. unfavorable source (n=83)	7.87	1.69				
Success vs. favorable source (n=81)	7.64	1.79				
Failure vs. favorable source (n=70)	6.28	2.77				
Affective motivation for action (AMA)			0.024	3	.995	.000
Success vs. unfavorable source (n=63)	4.54	1.63				
Failure vs. unfavorable source (n=83)	4.56	1.63				
Success vs. favorable source (n=81)	4.56	1.66				
Failure vs. favorable source (n=70)	4.50	1.71				
Affective motivation for rejection (AMR			14.302	3	<.000	.128
Success vs. unfavorable source (n=63)	5.09	1.75				
Failure vs. unfavorable source (n=83)	5.91	1.50				
Success vs. favorable source (n=81)	5.10	1.97				
Failure vs. favorable source (n=70)	4.03	1.84				
Pro-conduct Motivation (PcM)			15.416	3	<.000	.136
Success vs. unfavorable source (n=63)	6.74	1.77				
Failure vs. unfavorable source (n=83)	7.29	1.62				
Success vs. favorable source (n=81)	6.83	1.77				
Failure vs. favorable source (n=70)	5.34	2.17				

To locate the differences between certain pairs in the interaction model set, we performed the Tukey post-hoc comparison test, which provided the following results: In AMA, the comparison between the four groups did not display any significant differences; in PcM, the pairs comparison in the experimental conditions revealed significant differences between the condition of failure versus unfavorable source with failure versus favorable source (p<.000), and the condition of success versus unfavorable source with

failure versus favorable source (p<.000). The means comparison (Table 1) suggests that the recipients were more motivated to act when the news of failure came from an unfavorable source.

Dunnett's C post-hoc test for MM indicated that there are considerable differences in the means when comparing the following: groups of success versus unfavorable source with failure versus favorable source (p<.000); groups of failure versus unfavorable source with failure versus favorable source (p<.000); and groups of success versus favorable source with failure versus favorable source (p<.000). These differences imply that the recipients felt more morally motivated when the news came from an unfavorable source or from a favorable source reporting on the success of the action.

The Dunnett C test for AMR showed significant differences in the means when comparing the following: groups of success versus unfavorable source with failure versus favorable source (p=.002); groups of failure versus unfavorable source with failure versus favorable source (p=.000); and groups of success versus favorable source with failure versus favorable source (p=.001). The means comparison showed that the motivation to reject the news occurs when news of failure appear in a hostile medium, or in a consonant medium if the news report a success.

The results indicate that the reception of a news item that displays a negative valence in the social action presented by an unfavorable source generates greater affective rejection towards the failure of the cause, and better predisposes the activist to act in favor of the social causes. However, it has no effect on positive affective motivations. To assess whether PcM is a direct effect of the source versus valence of the result interaction, or whether intervening variables exist, we performed a hierarchical regression analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Result of the hierarchical regression analysis of the effect on pro-conduct motivation						
Variables	β(se)	t	R^2	ΔR^2	F	p
Step 1:			.070		22.07	<.000
News	-.484(.103)	-4.70				<.000
Step 2:			.137	.079	9.013	<.000
News	-.305(.105)	-2.90				.004
Moral motivation	.194(.051)	3.78				<.000
Affective motivation rejection	-.006(.068)	-.09				.929
Affective motivation action	.214(.061)	3.48				.001

One of the objectives of this analysis was to assess whether the effect on pro-conduct motivation is direct, mediated by other variables or modulated by them. The research procedure most frequently used to test mediation was developed by Kenny (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hayes, 2009) and consists of four stages. First, the causal independent predictor variable, in this case the news, must have a direct effect on the dependent variable. This is verified by observing the effect in MANOVA (Table 1) and in the first regression model obtained (Table 2). Secondly, the independent variable must have an effect on the possible mediator variables. This second supposition is only fulfilled in MM and AMR in our study (Table 1). Thirdly, these three variables (News, MM and AMR) should have a significant direct effect on the dependent variable PcM, which occurs in Step 2 of the regression for the "moral motivation" variable (Table 2). Finally, the effect of the mediator variable on the dependent variable should annul the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable, which does not occur since the effect of the news continues to be significant in Step 2. Therefore, mediation is not observed. The moderation hypothesis is confirmed if the increase in the proportion of variability due to the interaction is significant. Table 2 shows that this criterion is satisfied in Step 2.

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis show that the effect of the news on motivation to act is biased due to the presence of at least two factors: MM and AMA. Analyzing the conditions in order to assess the type of participation of these variables, we observe that they do not comply with the mediation criteria but do so with the modulation criteria, so, we conclude that MM and AMA are modulator variables on the effect of the news on the motivation for action.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Participation in the defense of social causes not only occurs within a favorable context, such as the digital environment (Sampedro & Martínez-Avidad, 2018), the cause itself must motivate the audience. In this study, we have tested the hypothesis that a message focusing attention on the cause (as a result of a successful outcome for the cause) will motivate the audience when it interacts with the favorability of the source. We have analyzed the effect on the pro-cause response of the interaction between source versus result of the pro-cause action on an audience previously sensitized by the social cause defended.

All judgement passed on a social object is determined by a cognitive and affective process (Oskamp, 1991). When assessing the efficacy of the communication, consideration is usually placed upon the utilitarian responses that are normally considered, such as the quantity and frequency of donations (Pinazo & Nos-Aldás, 2016) or the likelihood that a message is shared on social media (Brady, Wills, Burkart, Jost, & van-Bavel, 2018; Hansen, Arvidsson, Nielsen, Colleoni, & Etter, 2011). In both cases, it is brand penetration or the communication piece that is evaluated, rather than the content or sensitization to the cause itself. In this study, we have focused on sensitization in the pro-cause response and the conditions in which it can be identified.

The results show that reporting on the failure of the cause better sensitizes a pro-cause audience. This sensitization means there is greater affective engagement with the rejection of the cause's failure, and a greater predisposition to act in order to reverse this setback. This perception of failure is accentuated when reported in a hostile medium, so that the communication of failure versus hostile medium interaction is a source of affective and intentional pro-cause sensitization that is more effective than its reporting in sympathetic media and the communication of the cause's successes. This effect is modulated by the positive moral and affective motivation of the audience that reinforces this effect. Moral motivation and affective motivation for action modulate the effect of the news on pro-cause motivation. That is, the predisposition to act is in consonance with the reception of news of failure in a hostile medium. But this effect increases or decreases according to the effect of the news on moral motivation and the affective motivation for action. The sharper the perception of social injustice as revealed by the news and the greater the arousal of the emotions to act, the more likely the person will be to act in favor of the cause.

The results show that the message's positive or negative valence is relevant for keeping activists in protest mode. This fits with research that emphasizes the efficacy of designing communication strategies that go beyond mere emotional reaction or brand identification (Pinazo & Nos-Aldás, 2016). The results of this work show that at least one of the reasons why social media could boost citizen engagement and commitment (Boulianne, 2009; Dimitrova, Shehata, Strömbäck, & Nord, 2014; Norris, 2001; Papacharissi, 2002) is by coaxing activists out of their comfort zones. The potential of the media to access sources of information that challenge recipients' convictions could be one way of reactivating their efforts in defense of their causes.

The results of this work broaden the concept of the efficacy of communication for social change, from its ability to mobilize and educate (Obregón & Tufte, 2017; Pinazo & Nos-Aldás, 2016; Seguí-Cosme & Nos-Aldás, 2017).

4.1. Study limitations

Regarding the theoretical contributions of the results, one key limitation is the absence of an analysis comparing the pro-cause sample with an anti-cause sample. A study design that identified this type of audience and analyzed their reactions would be an important empirical and theoretical contribution to the knowledge of how to disseminate social causes.

Given that it is an experiment performed outside the laboratory, the results could have been affected by the diminished internal control that such conditions imply. Although the participants' attention while reading the message was controlled in part, we cannot guarantee that rejection of the source intervened more strongly than the need to carefully evaluate the meaning of the message. Control conditions, therefore, need to be bolstered in future studies.

Another issue that affects the relevance of the results is whether they can be generalized to include other communication frames. Replicating the study in different communication contexts would provide

additional evidence as to how messages against the social cause in hostile media can motivate the pro-cause audience. The study needs to be repeated in samples with population and/or cultural variants.

Notes

[1] See Annex for the experimental conditions applied to the design of the news item, at: https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.9852719.v1.

Funding Agency

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