

## ARTICLE

# The effect of corporate social activism: an integrative literature review

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### Abstract

Individuals and organized groups may adopt social activism to demand corporate change to tackle many issues, from the companies' lack of attention to social problems to global climate demands. This research considers that social activism influences organizations and aims to analyze the effects of this influence. An integrative review was carried out in the databases Scopus and *Portal de Periódicos da Capes*, identifying 152 articles to analyze the theories and constructs adopted, findings, and gaps in the literature on social activism. The results reveal that studies have analyzed social activism under different theoretical lenses, as a phenomenon of study, materialized in isolated actions, or as coordinated movements advocating a specific cause, bringing different effects to organizations. The literature reveals the use of different tactics to promote social activism and that gender equality, company diversity, and impact on environmental, social, and governance issues are examples of causes advocated. In the theoretical perspective, most of the studies did not mention a specific theory. Even when studies mention theories, they do it in a pluralistic way, not focusing on the development of one specific theory. The most recurrent theories identified were agency theory, institutional theory, stakeholder theory, digital activism theory, resource dependency theory (RDT), social movement theory, and resource mobilization theory. The theoretical connection, therefore, can bring new contributions to the study of social activism.

**Keywords:** Social activism. Social movements. Social media. Stakeholder activism. Resource dependency.

### *O efeito do ativismo social em organizações: uma visão integrativa da literatura*

#### Resumo

Da falta de atenção em questões sociais por empresas até demandas climáticas globais, indivíduos e grupos organizados podem utilizar-se do ativismo social para reivindicar mudanças corporativas. Com base no reconhecimento de que o ativismo social influencia as organizações, este estudo tem como objetivo analisar seu efeito em organizações. Por meio de uma revisão do tipo integrativa para análise do uso teórico, de constructos, achados e lacunas, foram identificados 152 artigos nas bases de dados Scopus e no Portal de Periódicos da Capes. Os resultados apontam para a análise do ativismo social sob diferentes lentes teóricas. Como fenômeno de estudo, ele se materializa em ações isoladas ou em movimentos coordenados na promoção e no apoio a uma causa específica, trazendo efeitos diversos para as organizações. A igualdade de gênero, a diversidade nas empresas, o impacto ao meio ambiente, as questões sociais e de governança são exemplos de causas ativistas, e os estudos apontam para o uso de táticas diversas na promoção do ativismo social. Na esfera teórica, não se verificou a aplicação de uma perspectiva teórica única, e grande parte dos estudos não mencionou uma perspectiva teórica específica. As teorias mais recorrentes identificadas nos artigos foram a teoria da agência, a institucional, a de *stakeholders*, a do ativismo digital, a da dependência de recursos (RDT), a do movimento social e a da mobilização de recursos. A conexão teórica, portanto, pode trazer novas contribuições para o estudo do fenômeno.

**Palavras-chave:** Ativismo social. Movimentos sociais. Mídias sociais. Ativismo de stakeholders. Dependência de recursos.

### *El efecto del activismo social en las organizaciones: una visión integral de la literatura*

#### Resumen

Desde la falta de atención a los problemas sociales por parte de las empresas hasta las demandas climáticas globales, las personas y los grupos organizados pueden utilizar el activismo social para reivindicar cambios corporativos. Basado en el reconocimiento de que el activismo social influye en las organizaciones, este estudio tiene como objetivo analizar el efecto del activismo social en las organizaciones. A través de una revisión integradora para analizar el uso teórico, los constructos, los hallazgos y las lagunas, se identificaron 152 artículos en las bases de datos Scopus y Portal de Periódicos da Capes. Los resultados apuntan al análisis del activismo social bajo diferentes lentes teóricos, como fenómeno de estudio, materializado en acciones aisladas o en movimientos coordinados en la promoción y apoyo a una causa específica, trayendo efectos diversos a las organizaciones. La igualdad de género, la diversidad en las empresas, el impacto en el medio ambiente, los problemas sociales y de gobernanza son ejemplos de causas activistas, y los estudios apuntan al uso de diferentes tácticas para promover el activismo social. En el ámbito teórico, no se verificó la aplicación de una sola perspectiva teórica y la mayoría de los estudios no mencionaron una perspectiva teórica específica. Las teorías más recurrentes identificadas en los artículos fueron la teoría de la agencia, la teoría institucional, la teoría de las partes interesadas, la teoría del activismo digital, la teoría de la dependencia de recursos (RDT), la teoría de los movimientos sociales y la teoría de la movilización de recursos. La conexión teórica, por tanto, puede traer nuevos aportes al estudio del fenómeno.

**Palabras clave:** Activismo social. Movimientos sociales. Redes sociales. Activismo de las partes interesadas. Dependencia de recursos.

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## INTRODUCTION

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Social activism is studied across a wide range of disciplines, including anthropology, sociology, political science, media, and communication studies, as well as art and design studies. The field, therefore, encompasses a rich and yet disparate body of knowledge, with diverse epistemologies and focal points. Social movement theory, for instance, arises as collective expressions of grievances or proposals for solutions to a problem affecting a specific group (Tilly, 1978). In the evolution of studies, theoretical research highlights the role that social movements play in institutional changes in modern societies and proposes a framework for convergent research in organizational studies and social movements (Davis, McAdam, Scott, & Zald, 2005; Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008). Along this line, Hiatt, Sine, and Tolbert (2009) recognize that social activism can harm certain business models, but also provides new opportunities.

Social activism gains prominence as a result of organizational practices. Lozano (2015) identifies NGO activism and stakeholder pressure as drivers of corporate involvement in sustainable practices. McDonnell and B. King (2013) detect significant changes in the communication strategy of target companies resulting from activist movements.

Additionally, activism targeting companies has gained academic attention in recent years, especially due to the increasing use of digital media as a new communication mechanism. Whether in research on corporate governance or studies on non-market strategies, activism emerges as a phenomenon that can influence the strategic management of organizations. The relationship between corporate governance and activism, for example, is driven by two processes: the propensity of shareholders to engage in activism in the target company and the willingness of the company's executives to make private deals with activists, according to authors Goranova, Abouk, Nystrom, and Soofi (2017). Socially oriented shareholder activism is an increasingly important mechanism through which social movement organizations seek to influence the private sector, exerting pressure on companies (Hadani, Doh, & Schneider, 2016).

Another set of studies, as per Piazza and Perretti (2019), highlights that the interaction between companies and activists is markedly strategic, and confrontation is usually rooted in the decisions made by the companies. Thus, to change the practices of potential target companies, activists engage in public and private policies (Baron & Diermeier, 2007). Although such comprehensive change is rare, the widespread adoption of environmental conservation practices, supplier codes of conduct, LGBT employee policies, and companies' corporate social responsibility initiatives have arisen in part because activists pressured companies to change (Bartley, 2003; Hoffman, 2001; Raeburn, 2004; Soule, 2009).

There is evidence that activism can affect the practices of a target that the activist opposes, such threats require a responsive and proactive strategy from organizations, as the material attributes of technology make established social norms more salient and technology can significantly affect the experience of organizations (Bartley & Child, 2011; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008).

Based on the recognition that social activism influences organizations, this study aims to analyze its effect on organizations. To this end, an analysis of 152 distinct papers selected as the body of data for this study was conducted. The following sections describe the review of studies on the topic, methodological aspects, results, discussions, and conclusions.

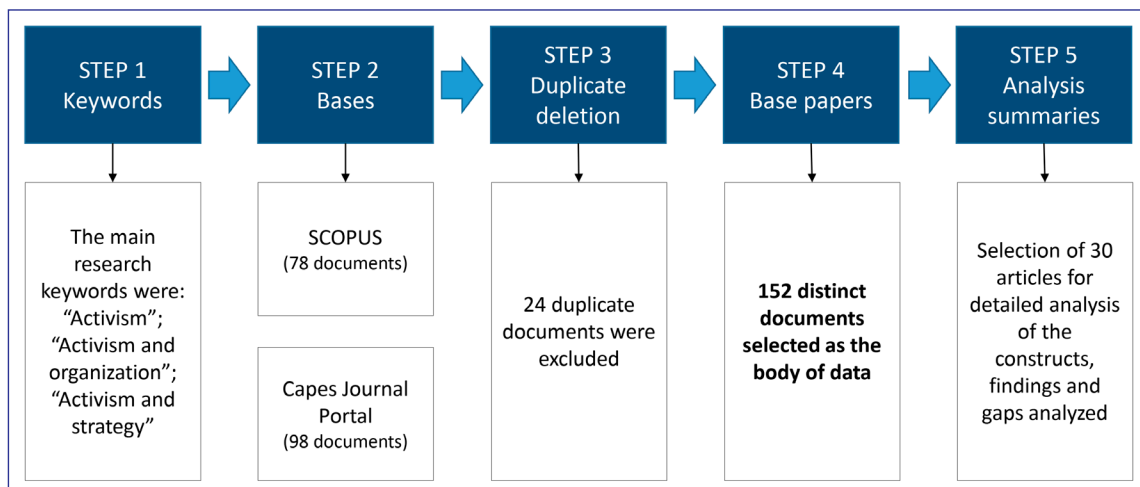
## METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

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The systematic review corresponds to a procedure in the field of bibliometric research, characterized by an integrative and strategic review. According to Velamuri, Neyer, and Moslein (2011), systematic literature reviews have increasingly been used in theoretical works in the field of social sciences to ensure greater rigor, robustness, and potential for replication. Pittaway, Robertson, Munir, Denyer, and Neely (2004) highlight that the systematic review follows a series of steps designed to give credibility and transparency to the method and guide the literature review. Thus, the present study fits into these definitions, as it aims to systematize the knowledge produced and contribute to the development of studies on the topic, presenting paths not yet explored by the reviewed literature.

The selection of papers was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) methodology, generating the synthesis of the result represented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**Search protocol**



Source: Research data.

For the construction of this study, an advanced search was chosen in the Scopus databases and the Capes Journals Portal. The main keywords for the search of papers were: "activism"; "activism and organization"; "activism and strategy". Thus, the research resulted in 176 documents, because 24 duplicate documents were excluded, totaling 152 distinct documents, selected as the data body.

To meet the objective of this study, the papers were classified into six categories of social activism, which emerged from the body of analyzed papers and were initially used to segregate the studies based on the objectives of the research: (a) **activism as non-market strategies** (13 papers); (b) **shareholder activism** (54 papers); (c) **activism promoted by digital movements and social networks** (15 papers); (d) **activism carried out as a strategy or due to the lack of corporate social responsibility** (8 papers); (e) **activism derived from environmental and sustainability impacts** (14 papers); and (f) **activism originating from various social movements in human rights** (48 papers).

In accordance with this classification, the abstracts were read with the aim of selecting scientific publications potentially adhering to the following inclusion (eligibility) criteria: (a) clearly contemplate the existence of actions or activist movements; (b) present activism as a tool for promoting changes; (c) be linked to the context of organizational studies; and (d) be a complete publication of a scientific paper.

In this way, 30 papers were classified (eligible) for full reading and detailed analysis of constructs, findings, and proposed gaps. Subsequently, a content analysis of the bibliographic portfolio was carried out, highlighting: (a) the year of paper publication and journal; (b) the name(s) of the papers author(s); (c) the study's objective; (d) theory(ies) addressed; (e) categories of analysis; (f) method used; (g) main results; and (h) gaps identified by the authors.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Studies on social activism show a diverse range of actors, activists, target companies, and dispersed objectives against organizations. Therefore, social activism is defined as an instance in which individuals or groups of individuals who do not have full access to institutionalized channels of influence engage in isolated or collective actions to remedy a perceived social problem or to promote or counter changes in the existing social order (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016; B. King & Soule, 2007; Tilly, 1978). In the spotlight are companies that play a fundamental role in the development of society, however, some actions promoted by these organizations may negatively impact a portion of their stakeholders (customers, suppliers, employees, the general community).

## Main Theories

In the theoretical field, it was observed that a representative part of the authors did not mention in their studies the application of a specific theoretical perspective nor did they follow any single perspective, but they resort to several theories. The most recurrent theories in the analyzed studies were **agency theory**, **institutional**, **stakeholder**, **digital activism**, **resource dependence (RDT)**, **social movement**, and **resource mobilization**. Other theoretical perspectives adopted in one or two studies were: media logic theory, neoinstitutional, contingency, boycotts, and resource-based view (RBV). It is noteworthy that, even with few studies, based on the recognition of the influence of social activism on corporate practices, RBV allows studying internal resources that can support activist demands and thus generate competitive advantage.

In Box 1, the main theories, and key arguments of the studies on the phenomenon of social activism are presented.

**Box 1**  
**Main theories employed in social activism research**

Examples of studies	Theories	Key Argument
Aiken and Lee (2020); Goranova et al. (2017); Guimarães, Leal, Wanke, and Morey (2019)	Agency Theory	Principal agent relationship with financial and social interests. Agency conflicts based on shareholder activism as a compound product of three latent components representing: (1) the propensity of activists to target a company; (2) the propensity of executives to cater to particular activists' demands; and (3) the long-term impact of shareholder activism.
Degli and Sacconi (2013); Gupta and Briscoe (2019); Mellahi, Frynas, Sun, and Siegel (2016)	Institutional Theory	The organization is subject to social and cultural pressures and institutional mechanisms. Strategic interactions between companies and stakeholders. Influence of institutions on actors' behavior. Companies' socially responsible behaviors impact the local community. The link between non-market strategy and organizational performance stands out in two strands of literature, namely CSR and CPA.
Doh and Guay (2006); Weinzimmer and Esken (2016)	Stakeholder Theory	The organization is seen as the center of a network of relationships with stakeholders and needs to respond to their claims. Which stakeholders are seen as legitimate actors in resolving social issues? Advantages and disadvantages of taking a corporate position on sensitive social issues and guidelines leaders should consider to increase the likelihood of success with multiple stakeholders.
George and Leidner (2019); Lewis (2005); Luo, Zhang, and Marquis (2016)	Digital Activism Theory	Social characteristics and Internet use by individuals and social movements that may affect corporate response. Cyberactivism tools, click activism, meta-evaluation, assertion, e-finance, political consumerism, digital petitions, data activism, exposure, and hacktivism.
Briscoe and Gupta (2016); Rajwani and Liedong (2015)	Resource Dependency Theory (RDT)	More favorable environment, which ensures the flow of critical resources to the company, through a variety of tactics. Interdependence between activists and the target organization. Just as the performance of organizations is affected by dependence on resources from the external environment, the tactics, strategies, and capabilities of activists can be influenced by dependence on resources from the target organization.
McDonnell and B. King (2013); Schneiberg, M. King, and Smith (2008); Waldron, Navis, and G. Fisher (2013)	Social Movement Theory / Resource Mobilization Theory	Diverse social movements to influence corporate response and impact the image, reputation, and performance of organizations. Access to resources (financial, human and infrastructure) as a fundamental element for the existence and success of a social movement.

Source: Research data.

Activism in shareholder relations stands out with a wide range of practices and influence on organizational results, such as investor relations (Rao & Sivakumar, 1999), use of codes of ethics (Stevens, Steensma, Harrison, & Cochran, 2005), executive compensation (Chowdhury & Wang, 2009), R&D (David, Hitt, & Gimeno, 2001) and corporate social performance (David, Bloom, & Hillman, 2007; Neubaum & Zahra, 2006). The core issue is that activist shareholders can request representation on the board of directors; reject proposals submitted for voting at general meetings; negotiate directly with management; use the media to inform other shareholders about the current situation of the company and about the necessary improvements, among other actions (Gillan & Starks, 2007).

**Agency theory** and corporate governance dominate research on shareholder activism. The activism literature has also adopted an agency-based view of governance, in which well-governed firms are less burdened with agency costs and therefore less likely to incite shareholder discontent and activism (Bizjak & Marquette, 1998; Carleton, Nelson, & Weisbach, 1998; Gillan & Starks, 2007). In this sense, the response of these target companies tends to resolve activist demands that generate value (Aiken & Lee, 2020; Balachandran & Faff, 2015; Goranova et al., 2017; Guimarães et al., 2019; Ivanova, 2016).

This field of study requires analyzing the activist shareholders in more detail, who the activists are (foreign or national; pension or investment funds) or what type of activist strategy they adopted (Guimarães et al., 2019). New research can differentiate when shareholder activism leads to overall value creation for the company and its shareholders versus value capture or value transfer between different groups of activists (Goranova et al., 2017). For Ivanova (2016), the research field of shareholder activism is relatively new, and little explored by academia, associated with the growing incidence of the phenomenon. Another relevant aspect is that agency conflict transcends the principal (shareholders) and agent (managers) relationship and can be studied in other relationships with stakeholders (clients, suppliers, employees, etc.) and for other reasons, in addition to financial ones.

Most of the **institutional theory** literature explores the challenges faced by firms in establishing legitimacy in various institutional contexts. In the field of non-marketing strategies, the recognition of activism as a driving mechanism of influence in corporate political activities stands out (Baron & Diermeier, 2007; Chatterji & Toffel, 2019; Hadani et al., 2016; Mellahi et al., 2016; Rajwani & Liedong, 2015).

In general, studies show activism through corporate political activity (CPA). CPA refers to corporate attempts to manage political institutions and/or influence political actors in ways favorable to the company (Hillman, Keim, & Schuler, 2004; Lux, Crook, & Woehr, 2011). According to Rajwani and Liedong (2015), what clearly emerges from the literature is the influence of context on the strategies used by companies and the type of results that CPA can achieve. More specifically, what is verified is that political activism is intrinsic in the relationships between companies and the government, that is, the authors highlight activism as a strategic action of the company, both in the political and social fields. Therefore, in line with studies on non-marketing strategies, the existence of activism as a driver of actions and tactics in the political and social environment is evident, with emphasis on the use of lobbying, contributions to campaigns, political ties and recurring interactions with the regulatory body, among others. As gaps presented in the field of CPA, it is suggested to carry out studies that explore how these activities affect other types of shareholder activism, including activism based on performance and governance (Baron & Diermeier, 2007; Hadani et al., 2016; Rajwani & Liedong, 2015).

Activism from the perspective of agency theory or institutional theory is focused on pro-business tactics, therefore, it differs from social activism against companies in which individuals engage in isolated or collective actions to remedy a perceived social problem, to promote or oppose changes in society. existing social order. Therefore, it is not clear from these theoretical perspectives the study of the social activism phenomenon under the prism of the activists' claims about the companies.

**Stakeholder theory** studies have long addressed the multiplicity of stakeholders and how companies should deal with stakeholder heterogeneity. Doh and Guay (2006) conceptualize Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as the notion that companies are responsible not only for their shareholders, but also for other interested parties (workers, suppliers, environmentalists, communities, etc.).

The central issue lies in taking a stand on a social issue that can lead to long-term competitive advantages but can also provoke the attention of social activists. Currently, there appears to be a dedicated research effort to establish connections between CSR and key business issues (Carrington, Zwick, & Neville, 2018; Degli & Sacconi, 2013; Doh & Guay, 2006; O'Rourke, 2003; Weinzimmer & Esken, 2016).

In this field of study, what is verified is the interconnection of CSR with stakeholder theory. More specifically, Doh, Husted, and Yang (2016) state that, according to the stakeholder theory view, it is not enough for managers to focus exclusively on the needs of shareholders or company owners. Stakeholder theory shows that it can be beneficial for the company to get involved in certain CSR activities that stakeholders with a non-financial view consider important, because, failing that, these groups may withdraw their support for the company. A deeper understanding of the phenomenon of CSR activities requires us to consider other stakeholders. These include customers, employees, governments, suppliers, taxpayers, community groups and underrepresented groups (Doh et al., 2016).

On the one hand, the link between CSR activities and stakeholder theory is evident, so that activism is seen as something that can impact an organization's image and reputation and, therefore, requires greater attention in communicating with stakeholders. On the other hand, the studies do not verify clear mechanisms of response to this type of activism, who the activists are, the degree of dependence of these stakeholders and the causes or main motivations of activism against the organization.

Despite the wide range of studies that address stakeholder theory, especially corporate social responsibility as a link between the company and the environment, no studies were identified that were dedicated to clarifying the phenomenon of social activism.

Digital movements and social media are recognized as a new tool for activists, while the online environment is a new locus for activism and interaction with target organizations. In this topic, we will detail activism through social media that have gained prominence in the academy, especially due to the impact of these media on the management of organizations (Cavalcanti, Bringel, Costa, Oliveira, & Zuccolotto, 2019; George & Leidner, 2019; Gomez- Carrasco & Michelin, 2017; Lewis, 2005; Luo et al., 2016; Van Dijck & Poell, 2013).

According to Luo et al. (2016), based on the definition of the theory of digital activism, the development of internet activism provides a new response pressure mechanism incorporated in societies. The authors point out that this activism is dispersed, fast moving and interactive, and therefore can effectively focus public attention and potentially harm a company's external image by generating social comparison.

The use of the internet by activists over the past two decades provides some potential for meeting this challenge. Compared to traditional media, the internet is much more difficult to regulate. Social media and digital communication greatly reduce the costs of participating in collective action (Kollock, 1999). Luo et al. (2016) highlight that speed is, therefore, essential to anticipate a negative public impression or change it.

Currently, digital media can be seen from two antagonistic perspectives. In the first, a positive way, with the characteristics of reducing the cost of communication, the speed of information, the elimination of physical distance and the convergence of culture. In the second, negative, highlighting the impoverishment of the political debate with more empty discussions (with a predominance of simplification), the use of fake news as a strategy to reiterate ideologies and the loss of privacy in cyberspace (Cavalcanti et al., 2019).

In the authors' view, one of the greatest challenges for activism specialists is how to overcome such different views. For George and Leidner (2019), qualitative research that explores the activities of specific groups or quantitative research that scours the huge repositories of social media data can improve understanding of this topic. According to the authors, the activities of the digital spectator constitute the largest volume of actions in digital activism and can be divided into clictivism, metavoicing and affirmation. Clictivism or Slacktivism is "Liking", Upvoting or "Following" an activist social media post or blog. Clictivism signals an endorsement of an existing post. Metavoicing is sharing, retweeting, reposting, and commenting on a social media post created by someone else. Affirmation is the action that describes creating social media content – informing others through video, audio, image, or text media.

In the research by Luo et al. (2016), the authors point out that the interactive features of online media were not captured, for example, quantifying the number of comments or the times a post was forwarded. Therefore, it is likely that the impact of internet activism on corporate response has been underestimated, and this is a possibility for further studies. That is, there are no studies that assess the impacts of clictivism, metavoicing and affirmation actions on corporate response or even on performance, reputation, or institutional image.

The online environment, therefore, requires greater research attention in the field of administration, with the objective of analyzing and understanding the effect of social media on company performance.

A salient feature of activism within and outside organizations presented in the analyzed studies is the nature of the interdependence between activists and the target organization. Just as organizations' behavior and performance are affected by their dependence on resources from the external environment (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Wry, Cobb, & Aldrich, 2013), activists' tactics, strategies, and ability to influence will be affected by their resource dependency on target organizations. With this understanding, **resource dependence theory** can explain the impact of social activism on target organizations, as it recognizes the effects of the environment on the results of organizational strategies.

The capacity to obtain vital resources, the negotiation and the relationship with multiple stakeholders are also fundamental activities in this perspective, which admit that certain changes in the environment occur, in part, by the determination of organizational administrators, because they are concerned with making the characteristics of the environment compatible. environment to the specific interests of their organizations. Likewise, this perspective can be used in activist claims. Indeed, recent research on social movements and non-market strategy has offered insights into how organization knowledge can provide strategic advantages for activists (Baron & Diermeier, 2007; Briscoe, Gupta, & Anner, 2015; Weber, Rao, & Thomas, 2009).

Applied to organization-oriented activism, greater relative dependence should dissuade people from engaging in disruptive activism, i.e., one that generates material or reputational costs for the target organization because of concerns about reprisals from members of the target organization (Briscoe & Gupta, 2016). In particular, internal activists, such as employees or shareholders, may feel more limited in their willingness to voice their grievances or push their goals, given their dependence on the target organization. On the other hand, the absence of relative dependence on a target organization may mean that activists will be more able to threaten the organization by expanding their tactical repertoire. Threats may be intended to impact organizational resources, routines, or reputations, increasing the likelihood that decision makers in target organizations will be forced to pay attention (Alinsky, 1971; Baron & Diermeier, 2007; B. King, 2008a).

In studies of social activism, dependence on resources from the perspective of the activist stands out, bringing an approach on the interdependence of the activist in relation to the target organization. This was the main theoretical approach in the organizational field that seeks to understand this phenomenon.

**Social movement theory** indicates that social activists are willing to engage in extra-institutional tactics, such as protests, boycotts, social movements in human rights, to press for changes in corporate policies and practices that have not been achieved through laws (Gupta & Briscoe, 2019). The authors argue that organizations tend to be more “open” or “closed” depending on the political ideologies of their members and that this variation can help explain companies’ responses to social activism.

In line with studies of activism in various social movements, there is a greater concentration of empirical research that seeks to analyze specific movements, events, protests, which are more related to traditional sociology (Dhir, 2007; Fisher, 2018; Gupta & Briscoe, 2019; Hertel, 2014; O’Connor, 2019). Few studies converge to the theory of the social movement in the organizational context, even though the pressure for response in the field of companies to social impacts is growing.

## Causes of social activism

With the analyzed theoretical perspectives, an attempt was made to identify, in the verified studies, the main causes or motivators of activism for the target organizations. In this way, we sought to synthesize the reasons for activism as an organizational strategy and for activism against companies according to the perspective of the researched authors.

**Box 2**  
**Causes of activism**

Category	Theories	Cause/Motivators	Authors
1. Activism in nonmarket strategies	Institutional theory; resource-based view (RBV); resource dependency theory (RDT); stakeholder theory; boycott theory.	Lack of social attention; strategic use of corporate political activity (CPA) by companies; managing political institutions and/or influencing political actors in ways favorable to the company.	Baron and Diermeier (2007); Chatterji and Toffel, (2019); Hadani et al. (2016); Mellahi et al. (2016); Rajwani and Liedong (2015)
2. Activism in shareholder relations	Agency theory; institutional theory; resource mobilization theory.	Individual interest of shareholders; financial gains; systemic corporate misconduct; use the media to inform other shareholders; mobilization of minority shareholders for specific causes; financial and social motivation of stakeholders.	Aguilera and Desender (2012); Becht et al. (2010); Clark and Crawford (2012); Davis and Thompson (1994); Goranova and Ryan (2014)

*Continue*

Category	Theories	Cause/Motivators	Authors
3. Activism in digital movements and social networks	Social movement theory; digital activism theory; media logic theory.	Use of new communication tools; new response pressure mechanism through social media; digital activism; click activism; data activism, exposure, and hacktivism; social media platforms; internet and other cyberactivism tools.	Cavalcanti et al. (2019); George and Leidner (2019); Gomez-Carrasco and Michelon (2017); Luo et al. (2016); Lewis (2005); Van Dijck and Poell (2013)
4. Activism in corporate social responsibility	Institutional theory; neoinstitutional theory; stakeholder theory.	Take a position on a social issue; support or oppose specific social issues; social responsibility projects developed by companies; lack of socially responsible behavior by companies.	Carrington et al. (2018); Degli and Sacconi (2013); Doh e Guay (2006); O'Rourke (2003); Weinzimmer and Esken (2016)
5. Activism in the environment and sustainability	Social movement theory; resource dependency theory (RDT); institutional theory.	Appeal to general public opinion; global warming; renewable energy; environmental disasters; dissemination of ecological sensitivity; impact on the environment.	Bodkin, L. H. Amato, and C. H. Amato (2015); Heyes and B. King (2018); Tramel (2018); Waldron et al. (2013); Zelko (2017)
6. Activism in social movements in human rights	Institutional theory; contingency theory; social movement theory.	Gender; sexual option; color; race; inclusive strategy; inequality (gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, or disability); political ideologies.	Dhir (2007); M. T. Fisher (2018); Gupta and Briscoe (2019); Hertel (2014); O'Connor (2019)

Source: Research data.

While the causes of activism against organizations are diverse in nature, activist movements are organized using different tactics to gain attention.

### Activist tactics against companies

In the study by Briscoe and Gupta (2016), the predominance of disruptive, persuasive and protest tactics was observed. According to the authors, in general, activism strategies have as their central purpose the obtaining of concessions, attracting attention and/or mobilizing participants. Social activists choose techniques from a wide repertoire of possibilities that can be classified as persuasive or influencing, or disruptive or protest.

#### Box 3 Activist tactics

Tactics	Description	Examples
Persuasive or influential	Aimed at convincing decision-makers in target organizations of the merits of activist claims.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lobby.</li> <li>- Testimony of victims.</li> <li>- Repudiation behavior against organizational actions.</li> <li>- Consumer decision to stop buying a product, service, or brand.</li> <li>- Dramaturgical performance.</li> <li>- Claims regarding the impacts of the company's activities on the environment and society.</li> <li>- Digital influencers through social media.</li> </ul>
Disturbing or protesting	Focused on creating material or reputational costs for target organizations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Boycotts against companies or products due to negative experiences.</li> <li>- Equipment sabotage.</li> <li>- Demonstration of protest and motorcades.</li> <li>- Disagreement with an action or with a set of actions and attitudes of a company.</li> <li>- Consumer ideological disagreement.</li> </ul>

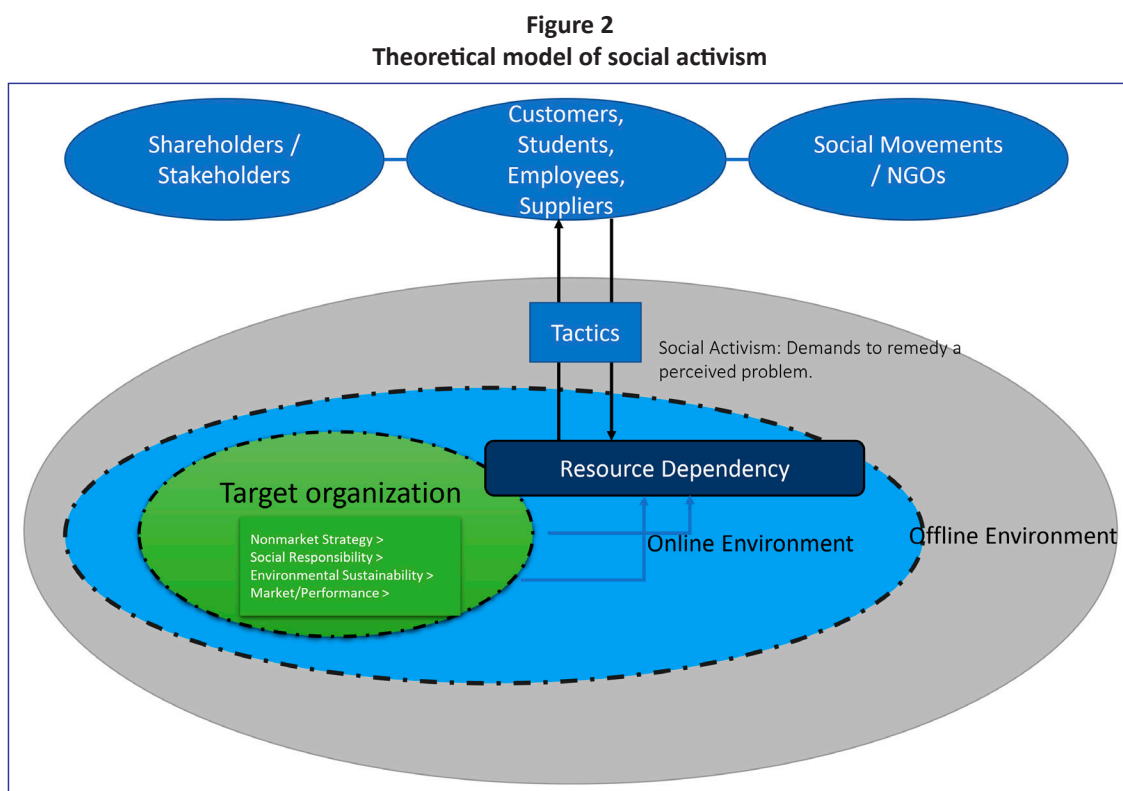
Source: Research data.



Employment of tactics is directly related to the cause or reason for activism against the organization. Consequently, with the use of tactics used by activists, studies have shown that organizations are more likely to give in to demands when threatened due to negative media attention (Ryan, 1991), use of disruptive tactics (Luders, 2006; Ingram, Yue, & Rao, 2010), successful viewer mobilization (Rao & Dutta, 2012) or financial and reputational impact on target organizations (B. King, 2008b; Zhang & Luo, 2013).

## Proposed theoretical model

Based on the theoretical framework studied, it is possible to verify that social activism materializes in the claims of activists for different demands, to remedy a perceived problem with a focus on target organizations. On the one hand, shareholders, social movements, NGOs, customers, students, employees, suppliers, and diverse stakeholders can pressure the target organizations to obtain answers to different questions and that can be manifested in isolation or in joint movements. On the other hand, the actions and strategies of the target organizations can remedy or enhance the attention of stakeholders, for or against the organization itself. Figure 2 presents the proposed theoretical model according to the analyzed studies.



Source: Research data.

Functioning as a communication channel and tool and even a pressure mechanism for responses, social media expanded the offer of social activism and made activist-business interactions more intense and dynamic. The online environment, therefore, favors the critical debate of stakeholders on different actions, whether in customer service or in organizational strategies related to corporate social responsibility, the internet can be considered a new environment to which organization must pay attention. Therefore, the online environment can minimize the interdependence of the activist in relation to the target organization; and from the perspective of the organization, it can bring implications in the relationship with the environment in the choice of resources. However, it is not clear from studies that address online social activism whether these actions can (and to what degree) impact customer acquisition, for example, and influence an organization's performance.

## CONCLUSION

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The main objective of this study was to analyze the effect of social activism in the organizational context. The analyzed documents exemplify the variety of perspectives brought to social activism and the evolution from the social to the corporate field. As noted, there are several theoretical perspectives brought to the analysis of activism, emerging discussions in the field, such as the impact on the social and environmental context and the need for a strategic review based on social responsibility actions, can be examples of how companies respond to the social activism.

As practical implications, the research demonstrated the effects of activism according to the claims of activists and the use of digital strategies to amplify engagement. If, before, the dissemination of information depended on the support of means of communication, through social media, its propagation can be done from any device connected to the network. This dynamic changed the transmission logic, carried out from “few to many”, making room for “all for all” sharing processes. In this way, even small groups, or individuals, with greater or lesser interdependence in relation to the target organization, can gain a voice by denouncing and putting little-known issues on the agenda of the day.

In the theoretical field, the most recurrent theories identified in the papers were agency theory, institutional theory, stakeholder theory, digital activism theory, resource dependency theory (RDT), social movement theory and resource mobilization theory. The theoretical connection, therefore, can bring new contributions to the analysis of the phenomenon.

As a limitation of the research, the field of study of social activism in the organizational context is recent and, therefore, requires greater attention, with a view to promoting a research agenda that expands the academic debate within the scope of administration, and this text was limited to the clipping of identified studies. Therefore, moving towards multitheoretical and multilevel research on social activism, the combination of some of the six theories reviewed in this paper creates a convergent starting point for future research on social activism at different levels of analysis, although research can still benefit from insights and additional loans.

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