

Insta-Awareness. Reconciling neo-liberalism and activism inside and outside the platforms*

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The paper analyses how activist creators use different strategies to gain attention, engagement and participation on social media. The work is based on 10 interviews with Italian social media activists and the content analysis of 595 posts and reels by the creators themselves. The results show how the creators implement different strategies and levels of adaptation with the logics of the platforms, according to their goal of professionalizing of the digital activism activity. Moreover, the interviewees show that combining the ethical demands of the activist cause with the entertainment logics of the platforms is a laborious task, requiring various mediations and negotiations at the level of practices, identity and values and the support of a network of “off-platform” assets.

Keywords: cultural creators; social media activism; social media engagement; platform activism

* Article submitted on 01/07/2024. Article accepted on 17/12/2024.

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Introduction

In this paper, I will try to provide some analytical and critical elements on the complex relationships between activism and influencers in the Italian landscape.

The topic of digital activism is not new to scientific research (Gerbaudo, 2017; von Bülow et al., 2019; Lievrouw, 2023). In this context, the contribution of forms of activism carried out by creators is central, adding material to recent academic debates on “influencer creep” (Bishop, 2022) by exploring the extent to which influencer culture creeps into different practices and forms of work, including activism. Several studies in recent years have highlighted the contradictions, both external and often internalized, that creators face in having to reconcile personal ethical and value standards with the logics of commodification and spectacle of platforms (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017).

Through a multimethod qualitative approach, the contribute explores how different instances of activism are configured on social media, reflecting on how the more or less business-oriented attitude of creators leads not only to different styles of communicative and ethical conduct, but also to a different relationship with off-platform cultural assets.

Literature review

Levine and Nierras (2007) define an “activist” as someone who seeks to advance a substantive political or social goal or outcome, although the term activist has been defined differently by social movement theorists (Oliver and Marwell, 1992). More fundamentally, participants in movements themselves understand the term “activist” in different ways (Cortese, 2015). Often digital activism is associated with civil disobedience: such as denial of service attacks, open source advocacy, hacktivism. Another form in which digital activism is present is in the development of networks that function for civic mobilization: social media platforms have been seen as a means of “organizing without organizations” (Shirky, 2009), with applications providing an alternative to vertical organizational bureaucracy. Social media platforms have greatly contributed to the emergence of collective actors and viral campaigns such as #MeToo, #Occupy, #Indignados, helping to define new identities, icons and slogans, and forging a new iconography and lexicon of activism. These phenomena have pointed to the intertwining of media production and the “doing” of activism, highlighting the centrality of social media platforms in mobilizing, broadcasting and enacting contemporary activism. While much of the literature in this area has examined the organizational and strategic consequences of using social media for protest purposes, comparatively little research has addressed issues of collective identity (Castells, 2011; Hara & Estrada, 2005; Kavada, 2010) and related forms of expressive rather than instrumental communication.

Social media has played a central role in defining new identity practices and activist aggregation, leading to a more mercurial, diffuse, multi-issue and open-ended logic focused

on temporary connections (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). This allows for the collection of individual contributions around a cause in the form of texts, images, selfies or videos that are added to those sent by other internet users.

In their book *#HashtagActivism*, Jackson et al. highlight that “this practice has led to the creation of networks that offer cathartic release and solidarity among those who share stories of victimization and survival, while making their political and cultural demands inescapable” (2020: 3). Hashtag activism can be seen as an example of how online activist practices are not exclusively centered on organizational and functional objectives, but are in many cases built on cultural and identity foundations, and are based on the logic of emotional accumulation of experiences, biographies and testimonies, rather than on truly organized collective action (Gerbaudo, 2022).

In general, socio-political discourse has become more mainstream (Vredenburg et al., 2020) and influencers are actively engaged in the debate, despite the potentially polarizing nature of this activity. According to the frequently cited definition by Crystal Abidin (2015), influencers are “everyday, ordinary internet users who accumulate relatively large followings on blogs and social media through textual and visual narratives of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their followers in digital and physical spaces, and monetize their followings by integrating ‘advertorials’ into their blog or social media posts and making physical appearances at events”.

Today, the term creator is often used as an alternative to influencer. The former emphasizes more the creative and qualitative aspects of the content produced, compared to the term influencer, which today seems to take on a more critical connotation emphasizing the para-social and brand identity aspects (Kozinets et al. 2023). In fact, it is increasingly associated with the digital economy (Audrezet et al., 2020; Smith & Fischer, 2021) and it is seen by many as antithetical to, or at least at odds with, the ethical and values-driven instances of activism. Here the terms “creator” and “influencer” will be used interchangeably as it is not easy to distinguish so clearly between the two typologies of practices in the sample. In fact, in the perception of users, influencers have increasing credibility as bearers of values, educational content and social demands (Statista, 2024). A study by the author on why influencers are considered important by young people shows that the educational aspects of the content they propose are a strong attraction for youngsters, and specifically, over 38% of the 540 influencers considered important by the involved sample (294 youngsters) were related to political or social activism topics (Taddeo, 2023a).

Several studies in recent years have highlighted the contradictions, both external and often internalized, that influencers face in having to reconcile personal ethical and value standards with the logics of commodification and spectacle of platforms (McRobbie 2016; Duffy et al., 2022). As Duffy et al. have noted, “critical attention to influencers - and the broader realm of social media celebrity - has proliferated in recent years” (2022: 1661). In his critical analysis of the influencer economy, Brown (2022) explores various strands of the influencer economy, ranging from IRL streaming to political activism, claiming that contemporary forms of political activism are increasingly shaped by concerns with monetization and visibility. Similarly, scholars have observed a “growing convergence

between politics and micro-celebrity/influencer culture” (Dean, 2023), demonstrating an increasing interest in how contemporary activist cultures are shaped by the neoliberal digital economy.

Indeed, several studies have shown that activism has positive outcomes for influencers in terms of follower engagement and emotional attitudes towards them (Thomas & Fowler, 2023).

The complex relationship between activism, capitalism and neo-liberalism is a relevant issue, particularly for the implications it has on the ways in which creators manage their identity and productive practices. As highlighted by studies on online feminist activism (Savolainen & Uitermark, 2022; Scharf, 2024) and green activism (Dekoninck & Schmuck, 2024), such contradictions are mainly reflected in shaping the identity perceptions of the activists themselves (Scharf, 2016). Through this study I will show how such tensions also lead to different forms of alliances and strategic uses of communicative assets within digital platforms and in the offline world.

Method

I carried a research work dedicated to investigating the ways in which creators of educational and activist instances realize their path within the constraints and opportunities of social media platforms.

The methodological standpoint of the research is that of an exploratory case study analysis (Yin, 2018). To analyze the themes presented, I used in-depth interviews conducted with 10 Italian content creators engaged in online activism and the analysis of 595 posts and reels realized by the same creators over a quarter of the time.

For the selection of the sample, I followed a “purposive sampling” approach (Emmel, 2013). This is a selective form of sampling, in which the researcher has the discretion to select cases that share common characteristics. From the pool of influencers identified in the previous research (Taddeo, 2023a), I selected creators that covered the different areas of activism that were found to be significant in the previous research namely: 1) knowledge and awareness, 2) environment and sustainability, 3) human rights, and 4) mental and body health. I also tried to include creators with different levels of popularity on social media, which is why there are 4 creators who can be defined as “macro-influencers” (>100.000 followers) and 6 who can be defined as “micro-influencers”. The interviews, conducted via videoconference between April and June 2023, were recorded, transcribed using the AI tool AssemblAi, and then coded and analyzed using the qualitative analysis tool NVivo. A summary of the sample interviewed, with metrics for June 2023, is shown in Figure 1.

<i>Creator</i>	<i>Category influencer</i>	<i>Issue</i>	<i>Instagram followers</i>	<i>Facebook followers</i>	<i>Tik Tok followers</i>	<i>N. of post/reels analyzed</i>
Andrea Nuzzo @nootso	Macro Influencer	Knowledge and awareness	107k	348.2k	110	44
Valentina Pano @sonomelaidi	Macro Influencer	Knowledge and awareness	43.8k	109.4k	101	9
Cristina Cotorobai @cotoncri	Macro Influencer	Sustainability	109k	No	783	12
Valeria Melocchi @makeyougreener	Micro Influencer	Sustainability	71.9k	1.8k	74	45
Silvia Moroni @parlasostenibile	Macro Influencer	Sustainability	151k	29.5k	Inactive	64
Francesca Napoli @storiadallaltromondo	Micro Influencer	Human rights	64k	Inactive	Inactive	13
Leila Mohamed @leila.belmoh	Micro Influencer	Human rights	54.7k	Inactive	No	26
Maruska Albertazzi @maruskaalbertazzi	Micro Influencer	Mental and body health	12.6k	2.1k	No	243
Paola Torrente @paola_torrentereal	Macro Influencer	Mental and body health	684k	5.8k	No	16
Luna Pagnin @spaziolunare_	Micro Influencer	Mental and body health	50.4k	15.3k	1.8k	14

Figure 1. The sample of creators

In addition to the interview material, I conducted a longitudinal content analysis for each creator, following their Instagram profile on a daily basis from February 2023 to June 2023, observing all the post and reels produced during such time and downloading Instagram content relevant to the 3 dimensions studied (ethic, communication style and aim of activism). All material (interviews + Instagram content) was then entered into Nvivo to assist with coding and analysis. The analysis and coding used a thematic approach inspired by the seminal work of Braun and Clarke (2012).

Figure 2 shows the interpretative nodes used during the coding of the social media content of the surveyed creators. A summary of the main findings is proposed in the following sections. For reasons of compliance with ethical standards agreed with the participants, the contents of the interviews were anonymized.

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Nodes for the coding</i>
Ethic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • negative vision • positive vision • neutral vision • negotiation
Communication approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dramatic • playful • emotional • biographical and intimate • aggressive • relational and interactive
Aims of activism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inform • raise awareness • activate towards a specific individual action • support psychologically • organize collective action • transform institutional and political aspects • raise funds
Monetization strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advertising • selling own products • self-branding • courses • events • collaborations with social and cultural institutions • no one

Figure 2. Synoptic diagram of the content analysis performed on posts and reels published from February to June 2023 by the sampled creators

The relationship between professionalization and social activism

In order to read the different interpretations of activism, I considered a first part of the interview dedicated to understanding why one had ventured into this type of content production, whether and how this practice was linked to other activist practices, and whether and how it fitted in with one's professional profile and/or with the goal of professionalization and future monetization.

In this way, the interviews reveal different experiences that the creators themselves wanted to share. In particular, we can identify moderately integrated approaches and, on the contrary, approaches that show forms of intolerance and resistance to the dynamics of social media platforms.

The central aspect that emerges is that the panorama of creators, although often portrayed as compactly linked to neoliberal logics and identity branding practices, presents very diverse characteristics: some creators have started producing content linked to social and activist themes because they were already involved in this type of pathways in their human and professional journey, as, for example @maruska, who was already involved in various issues related to wellbeing and mental health and therefore adopted social media

as another channel to add to those already cultivated for raising awareness (television programs, collaborations with associations and local actors and activities about eating disorders related to the hashtag #larinascitadellefarfalle).

This approach involves the use of social media and the creation of activist profiles as complementary means to achieve one's social goals, as also described by this other creator:

(knowledge and awareness activist 1) Let's say I was not born an activist. I was born a professional, because I am a lawyer anyway, I work for an association. After years as a user, I really felt the need to use it as a means of dissemination, because it was no longer enough for me to do it myself, and so I needed to share it. A little bit also as a mechanism to relieve myself of the burden of living in demanding situations, like helping people who are extremely suffering or facing unchangeable realities, in a way. So it is very frustrating. And so sometimes sharing gives you the feeling that you can at least denounce and thus widen your scope.

Other creators started out as simple producers of entertainment content, without any specific civil and cultural objectives, and then gradually turned their content towards more social themes and issues. This is the case of Andrea Nuzzo, who, as a high school student, playfully created the "Sii come Bill" page on Facebook, which became a viral phenomenon with more than a million users in just a few years. From this initial approach to social media, the creator defined and refined his visions over the years, opening the Instagram profile @nootso to propose an alternative vision of social media and digital consumption. This progressive approach to civic engagement also led him to create a collective of "unfluencers", i.e. creators who seek to challenge the logics of platforms in order to propose quality content aimed at personal growth.

Thus, while some creators have taken up this practice of producing awareness-raising and activism-related content as a "complementary" part of their own identity and professional positioning outside and inside social networks, others have decided to take up activism themes with the specific aim of using it as a lever to improve their own professional development and as a channel of monetization.

This is the case of creators who after graduating decided to embark on a digital career, using their passions and identity values as tools to launch a professional career in content creation and influencer marketing.

(green activist 1) When I realized that people were not only interested in sustainable food, which was perhaps a bit too small, like a niche, but really asked about all of life, let's say sustainable, then I expanded what I was talking about (...). And then also my nick name: I don't deny that I chose it a lot as a branding. I mean, I didn't want it to be just "my stuff". I wanted it to be a project that could eventually break away from me. So I gave it a name that wasn't "My Eco Tips" or something like that.

(green activist 2) But then, of course, I have a law degree and a master's degree in international relations, and after being a lawyer I realized that I didn't like it and I wanted to be a diplomat, but already during my master's degree in Milan I was trying to live plastic-free and so I already had various difficulties in finding ways to be more sustainable. And I saw that some online publishing projects, after a few years of course, with the creation of a community, turned into big projects (...) so I started looking online to see if there was anyone who could answer my need for information on sustainability. And, in my opinion, there wasn't

enough talk about it, or rather I couldn't find anyone who was talking about it the way I needed to talk about it.

In the following paragraphs it will be possible to observe, especially through content analysis, how precisely the biographical-professional pathway of the creators can be correlated with different ethical, communicative postures and ultimately different approaches of activism.

From a methodological point of view, having had the opportunity to compare the creators' declarations and self-perceptions in the interviews with their production of content in the social media, has often allowed me to calibrate the different positions or to intercept a gap, often unnoticed, in other cases suffered, between attitudes (emerging from the interviews) and actual behavior (as made explicit in the posted content) of the subjects: evidence of a not easy relationship between neoliberal logics pushed by the platforms and the ideals and identity values of the subjects.

Ethic

It is precisely the origins and objectives of the creators that consequently shape the ideological attitudes with which they approach, day by day, their relationship with the platforms and with their followers.

It can be seen that this relationship is more positive and instrumental in the case of creators who use social networks for professional purposes, while it is more critical and, in some cases, conflictual in the case of those who use them as "additional" channels for other paths.

In some cases, this conflictuality and discomfort takes the form of a real protest integrated with the proposed instances and messages, as in the post by @leila.belmoh, where the creator/journalist shows herself in a striking pose and close-up, with the text "Sorry, I must unlock the algorithm", to denounce the visibility logics of the platforms that reward sexualizing and objectifying content by shadow-banning the creator's more political content.



Figure 3. A post titled “I must unlock the algorithm” to denounce the popularity logic of algorithms that penalize “sensitive” social and political content.

In other cases, creators feel called upon to defend their otherness in relation to the typical monetization mechanisms of platforms and influencer marketing, as in the reel in which @nootso responds to a comment accusing him of adv by pointing out that he only accepts a small minority of sponsorships compared to the thousands he receives daily, and that he prefers to prioritize the quality of the content and his own values.

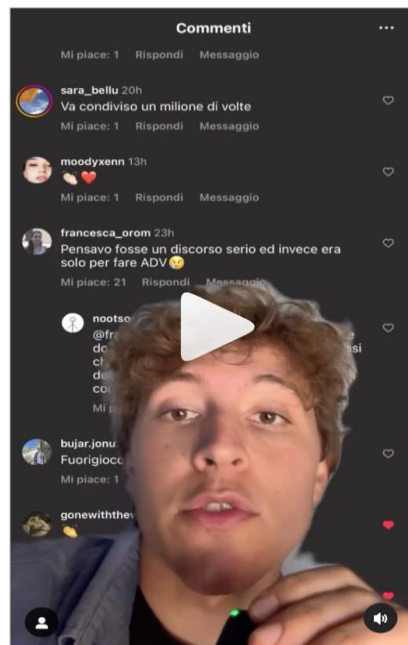


Figure 4. A reel from @Nootso in which the creator responds to some followers by asserting his autonomy from the monetization logics of social media.

Although the relationship with the commercial logics of the platforms can find different interpretations and levels of negotiation, all the interviewees show a very similar level of pressure, external but also internalized, towards the set of ethical and social values to which they have dedicated their activism.

Consistency, or even, in other words, the authenticity of their path (Polesana, 2021; Hund, 2022), seem to be moral imperatives that permeate personal life far beyond the social media “persona”.

(green activist 2) I'm in Sri Lanka now and obviously to get to Sri Lanka I got on a plane. Of course I've had “criticism” from people who say “yes, but you're talking about sustainability and you're taking the plane”. But I also take it because I know that when I come here I am committing to not just being a tourist, but to being an earthly being who is trying to bring value, and so taking the plane is compensated by how I behave in the place where I am.

(green activist 1) Because followers see sustainable coherence as a way of life. It's true. (...) I went to H&M once, bought something and regretted it for who knows how long. What am I saying? I bought something at H&M? But can I really go in? A I can't go into fast fashion, I can't go in there anymore, and that's good, even if I didn't buy anything there.

Communicative approach

Communication approaches are also very varied, depending on the vertical content proposed and also on the positioning of each creator with respect to the social cause. Creators who understand online activism as an approach aimed at building market positioning and a specific brand, adopt all the different communication strategies known to adhere to the attention economy. Thus, for instance, they create content that is curated in terms of image and visual rhythm, build attention points based on surprise and curiosity, activate channels of interaction and dialogue (polls, questions in posts), and adopt in many cases a committed but calibrated tone of voice, free of excess, tinged with irony and positivity (Taddeo, 2023b). Thus, although they often speak of world problems, crises, contrasts, they most often avoid dramatic, gloomy or accusatory styles.

(green activist 1) What I used to do a lot was just use the metaphor and then associate a climate situation with something completely different, right? Or, for example, relate what's happening in the climate or, I don't know, the argument, to everyday life. So: living and doing things now and in the meantime telling them something else (...) or, I don't know, I use characters a lot because I want them to become a bit of a mascot in the end. A professor of mine (...) told me that he liked my characters so much because they are obviously my two personalities. But they're the personalities of so many people, obviously there's never just one idea about anything, hopefully.

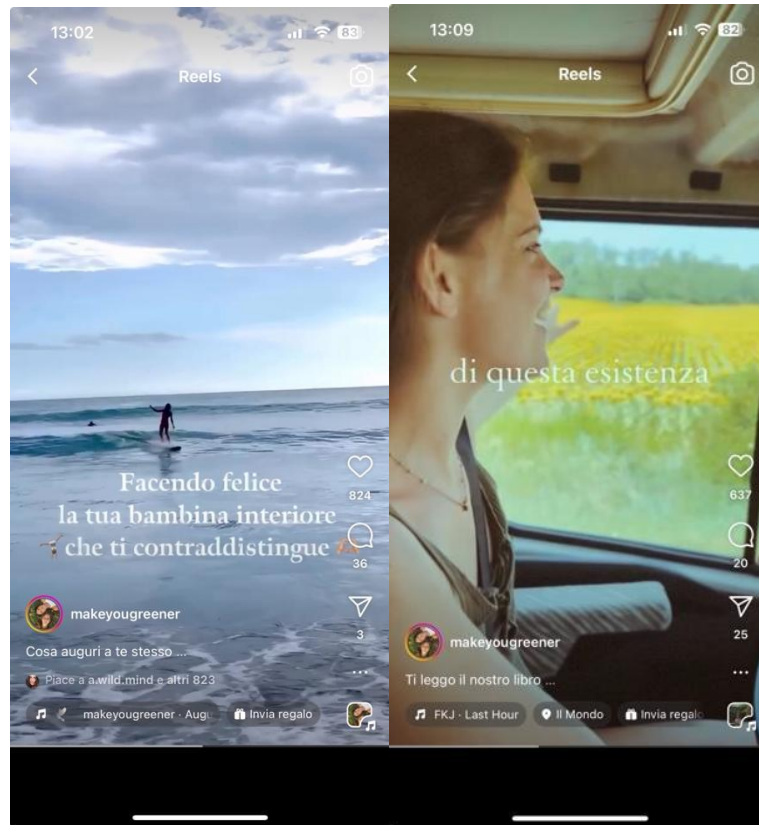


Figure 5. Some of @Makeyougreener's content showing a communicative style oriented towards emotionality, irony and storytelling.

On the other hand, creators who feel less connected to the logics and aesthetics of the platforms tend to reject these kinds of stylistic conventions and also act in ways that may seem counterproductive, seeking provocation, emotional and ethical discomfort, and the often emotionally charged interpellation of users.

(knowledge and awareness activist 2) I don't really look at the insights because I'm more interested in the quality. I mean, if I want to talk about this thing right now, I don't care (...) even if I have two views, I don't care. I talk about this thing over there and I come back to this thing.

There are also more nuanced cases: this is the case of the @Cotoncri profile, which despite having a constant and clear relationship with commercial partnerships often focuses on issues of respect for the environment avoiding glamorous and condescending tones, in some cases going so far as to directly implicate its followers, or to accuse other creators or brands themselves, including giants such as Gucci or Versace, of greenwashing. Her contents show an impatience with the accommodating logic of platforms and are often sharp, grotesque, uncomfortable.

While the tone of the messages can therefore also be edgy and divisive, the quality of the content is always very careful, in the rhythms, in the photography, in the dialogues, so as to

be able to maintain a high level of competitiveness for the attention and approval of followers.



Figure 6. Some creators, such as @Cotoncri, use the tones of grotesque satire and denunciation for their activist communication, putting themselves in a more “uncomfortable” position than the typical aesthetics of social media engagement.

Aims of activism

The different backgrounds and trajectories of social media creators also lead to different goals for their online activism.

Some creators put in their editorial strategy firstly cognitive goals, such as increasing knowledge and awareness of civil and cultural issues that are considered underrepresented in the mainstream information world. Usually, they aim to promote a proactive and participatory sense of problem solving rather than just a better knowledge of the issues, by stimulating the activation of everyday, simple and ordinary behaviors. They however manage to expand from the micro dimension of the individual sphere, trying to overcome the barrier of a sense of powerlessness and inspire more and more people.

(green activist 2) I used to find that sustainability, and I see it every day, puts you in a bit of a bind because it's often dealt with by people who feel "elevated", so they basically put themselves on a pedestal, these people are telling their interlocutor what to do and what not to do, making them feel guilty. But it's not a competition of who's better, instead there's a bit of this constant that if you say you're living a sustainable life, it has to be all round, there's always this attitude of not doing enough... if you're not vegan, it's not OK, if you don't have this bank, it's not OK and you have to feel guilty. Instead, I wanted and sought a more inclusive and less polarizing, even less judgmental, communication.

In some cases, especially among creators who are more interested in professionalizing and commercially verticalizing their profile, this responsible behavior is linked to instances of consumer activism, where ethical and social commitment manifests itself above all in the form of targeted sponsorship and marketing of their own products.



Figure 7. Three reels from @parlasostenibile which show different goals of her activism strategy: 1) improve knowledge 2) change simple daily individual behaviors 3) move toward "responsible consumption".

Other creators, on the other hand, aim to achieve direct, operational effects in everyday life favoring the exit from the virtual world and also from the sphere of individual action, toward the activation of collective gestures such as meetings, demonstrations, petitions, fundraising.

(knowledge and awareness activist 1) I think that online activism doesn't stay online anyway, because it's a means of pressure, right? However, if it is well communicated, even a petition, even a click, can put pressure at a government level, at a political level, so many opinions can make an issue popular and thus move the press, can push pressure campaigns through large international organizations. In short, it is still a democratic tool to make your voice heard, and I think that those who were lazy before will remain lazy, and between doing and not doing, it is better to do something and still make your voice heard. I mean, of course, the risk is that we get used to it, so it's always important to maybe push for something more, so not just to say "like by empathy", but also maybe to ask to inform, to reveal, to protest, so always pushing for

something more. (...) I collected money to pay the ransom for some guys in Libya, we're talking about 4000 euros in a few hours, you can mobilize people if you need to.

Although the different creators may therefore propose very different instances of action and transformation of everyday life, they all see the world of social media as a context capable of reaching large audiences and of reaching “outside their bubble” people usually not sensitive to the instances proposed.

The importance of off-platform assets

The analysis of the contents and interviews also revealed another important element of interest: none of the creators showed that they could and would manage their social awareness practices solely through social media, but all of them identified one or more strategies for integrating this channel with other tools from more traditional contexts outside the world of platforms.

Different techniques and channels are used in this regard: from the mobilization of networks of activists “outside” the digital, as in the case of @maruska, to the formation of collectives of creators such as the group of “Unfluencers”, by @nootso, who promote diversified content policies online among creators; from the use of platforms as “attractors” to push polls and political movements, as in the case of @leilabelmoh, to the proposal of forms of “responsible consumption” as proposed by @parlasostenibile, or at book launches as for @makeyougreener.

All the creators analyzed have therefore implemented off-line assets that allow them to diversify and, in some way, autonomize their activity from the platforms (Taddeo, 2024), although we can notice that the objective of these tools is different. The creators who have professionalized their social media activism, making it a job, use these assets from the physical world (books, events, meetings with audiences, merchandising) as tools to diversify the “touch points” with their audiences and enrich their marketing strategies beyond the revenue models of the platforms. Creators, on the other hand, who do not have specific objectives of monetizing their online activism, make use of these offline tools mainly to loosen their dependence on platforms and maintain a margin of cultural autonomy with respect to their logics.

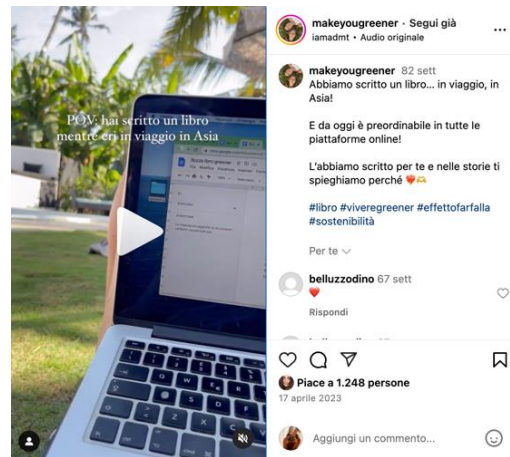


Figure 8. The production and sale of books, as in the case of @makeyougreener, is an example of the diversification of off-line assets proposed by the more monetization-oriented activists.



Figure 9. The creation of events and physical networking is an example of an off-line asset most used by activists who do not have direct monetization goals, as in this case of @maruska.

Conclusions: creativity and negotiation in platform activism

The analysis of the interviews and the material collected in the creators' profiles revealed a panorama that acknowledges the complexity and often contradictory nature of the world of social media activist-creators.

In the face of a growing and recognized demand for value-based content linked to ethical and social demands (Meta, 2022), the analysis also showed that the reasons for embarking on this type of path and the objectives are very diverse, ranging from existential dimensions

aimed mainly at personal sharing, to more business-oriented demands and an emerging professionalization of social media activism (Hutchinson, 2021).

The biographical backgrounds that lead the different creators to embark on this type of journey thus also strongly influence the content produced, as seen, shaping both the ethical aspects, communication styles and the very goals of activism.

In the case of creators who combine social media with other social and professional activities, it was possible to identify a more “resistant” and less compliant approach, both towards the logics of the platforms (format, timing, types of content) and towards the followers themselves (more frontal and direct forms of interpellation).

On the other hand, creators who have built a professional career were more willing to integrate their values into the dynamics of attention, engagement and emotional recognition (Poell et al., 2022) promoted by platforms. They are therefore more careful, for example, not to encounter censurable or shadow-banned content, or divisive or polarizing content that inevitably leads to hate speech issues. They also seek to integrate the content of activism with forms of mediation in relation to consumerism logics, thus proposing what we might call more “pop approaches” to activism itself, integrating it with forms of consumption, identity aesthetization and aspirational proposition (Nickel and Eikenberry, 2009). This implies an articulation between the personal and the collective, the profit and no profit, in which personal experiences become the basis for “collective story-telling”, aimed at constructing a collective identity, in a bottom-up process and nurturing social instances of activism (Klandermans, 2014). The need to reconcile the values and ethical demands promoted at a personal level with those of the platforms is a common theme among the cases analyzed. This tension is perceived as a specific “job” to cope with for creators, determining their credibility and social capital and able to legitimize their role and credibility inside and outside the platforms (Scolere, 2019; Villegas-Simóne et al., 2023).

Creators therefore show that they have internalized and to some extent coped with the grip of slippery platform activism and are aware of the link between the institutional and cultural dimensions of platformization (Poell et al., 2019), sometimes trying to adapt, sometimes trying to negotiate with the constraints generated by the affordances of the platforms (Bucher 2019).

To respond to this fatigue, creators adopt different strategies, which usually involve going beyond the purely digital dimension and building links, networks and forms of collaboration with the traditional cultural industry (Taddeo & Diaferia, 2024) and with networks of actors outside the social media world.

The need to build relationships with the outside world and with traditional market and cultural actors appears, as we have seen, to be a transversal asset common to all the creators analyzed, although used for very different purposes, ranging from the diversification of revenue channels, in the case of professional activists, to the management of spaces of cultural autonomy, for independent activists with no direct monetization purposes. In any case, all these practices of connecting with outside platform contexts can be read as forms of negotiation and resistance to the cultural, but also psychological and emotional, pressures of platformization (Nieborg et al., 2019).

The different approaches are all, in their diversity, interesting contributions that show how platformized activism is a result of the co-constructions at play in the intertwining of platform affordances and enactments of activism.

Moving forward, as Poell et al. (2022: 131) note, it is important not only to celebrate the efforts of platform activists, but also to “critically assess whether [these efforts] effectively enable cultural workers to strengthen their position within the cultural industries and vis-à-vis platform companies”.

On this interaction between physical and media contexts, between professionalization and amateurism, and finally between acceptance and rejection of social logics, it will be important to continue research in the future, also by investigating communication channels “under the radar” (Boccia Artieri et al., 2021) and their role in reconfiguring overall communication strategies.

Nota biografica

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