

Design for

# #activism

Changing the world through the screen





**'Designing the world we want' research series**

**// Exploring and understanding how design can empower individuals and lead to actions to improve their lives. //**

A large crowd of people at a protest or rally, overlaid with a blue and yellow gradient. The text "#Context" is prominently displayed in white on the left side of the image.

# #Context

# Activism & Design

Today we talk about **micro-powers** and **grassroots movements** that allow any individual to give visibility to social issues, and consequently, achieve relevant changes.

Most of the times, the focus is on the relationship between **activism and social media**, and how it facilitates the access and communication to a broad audience.

However, the **design** is a **strategic part of this relationship**. The decisions taken have a great impact on **attracting or distancing** individuals.

We chose this research path to **enlighten and empower non-designers**, to **raise awareness** towards what needs to be seen and encourage people to join our **design dialogue in activism** movement.

**#RefugeesWelcome**

**#FridaysForFuture**

**#MeToo**

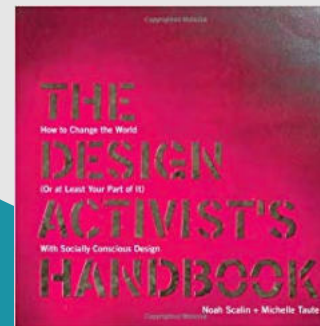
# Design References



In the '70s, **Victor Papanek** wrote *Designing for the real world*, in which he discusses using design to promote a reflection and meet the needs of society. Especially, in promoting an anti-consumerism perception.

Some **research references** develop the idea of creating a **bridge** between **activism and design**. They remark the substantial efforts that professional designers should do to include a **social perspective** in their projects.

The subject is still relevant nowadays. We will be always living a **process of transforming design and activism into something intrinsic**, in which one cannot exist without the other.



In 2014, *The Design Activist's Handbook: How to Change the World with Socially impact* enlightens how designers can transform their work into rewarding experiences through social initiatives.

## #Research Objectives

# Activism design for non-designers

Taking the previous references as our starting point, this research is focused on activism for non-designers. We consider that design is democratic, inclusive and must be accessible to everyone.

## Goals

- Uncover users' **reasoning, motivations and beliefs** to adopt a cause / take part in a movement.
- Understand what visibility / awareness means.
- Identify how the **context** influence them.
- Discover how they **act and what design aspects they most value** and consider **effective** to raise awareness.

## Users

- In-depth interviews
- 8 users-activists
- Between 18 and 43 years old
- From different contexts
- Currently living in Spain

# Social causes

To achieve the research goals, we have interviewed activists that are committed to supporting different **causes and social movements**:

**#Animal welfare**

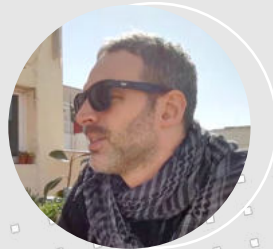
**#Climatechange**

**#LGBTI+**

**#Health**

**#Feminism**

**#Poverty**



#Hypothesis & research questions

# What is the design's role in digital activism?

Our **research questions** were expanded throughout the project:

1. **What are the motivations to act?**
2. **What means to raise awareness to a cause?**
3. **How to use design strategies in benefit of the cause there are standing up for?**
4. **What strategies are more effective?  
Do they change according to the social media?**



A large crowd of people at a protest or rally, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue shape in the bottom left corner. The text is centered in the upper half of the image.

# What lead activists to act?

# What lead activists to act?

This is the first thing we asked our users: **Why do you care?** and their answers are far to be simple, considering they are moved by a mix of reasons that eventually make them act.

To clarify the question, we propose to understand underlying activists **perceptions and motivations using 3 levers.**

## Levers

Emotional bias

Activism ecosystem

Commitment

# Emotional bias

The activism discussion is centred in **emotions**, as they are key to drive individuals into a behaviour-changing attitude.

In this case, emotions arise as a reaction to something that might **happen to us or, at least, we feel close to us**.

According to the users, there are factors able to 'boost' this emotional reaction. Some of the factors that motivate their decisions are due to past experiences such as **personal values**. However, they assume the **context**, is as much as influential:

C

**CONTEXT:** how the environment clouds in the way individuals support a cause. i.e. friends, work, family, etc.



**PERSONAL VALUES:** the basis built by past experiences or a behaviour cultivated over the years. i.e. education.



**RELEVANT EVENT:** a serious or mediatic happening that calls society attention. i.e. political statement, violent event, etc.

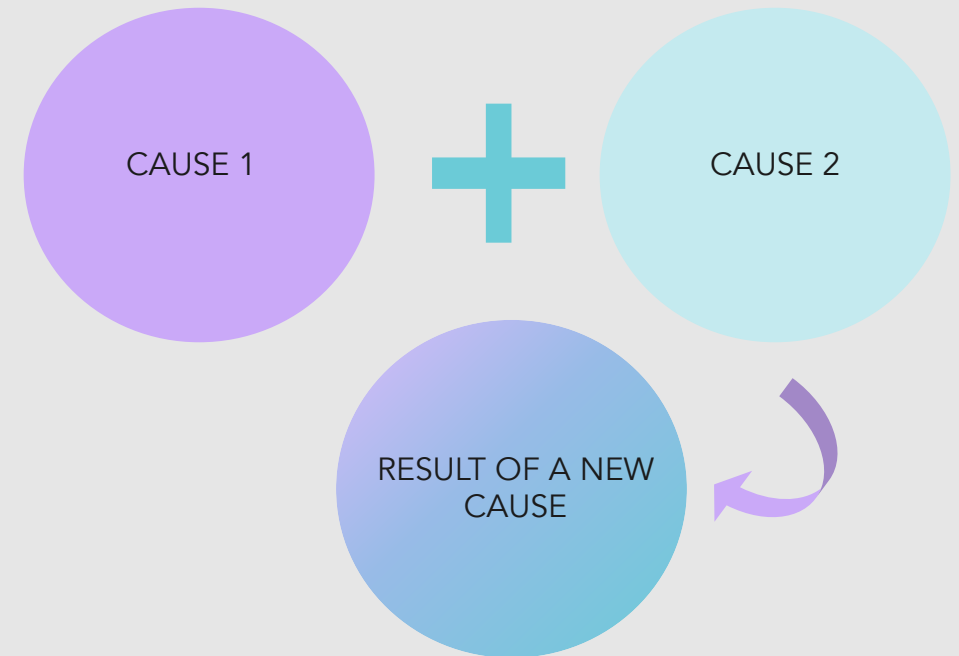
e

**ENGAGEMENT:** the possibilities users have to support a cause considering their lives. i.e. stay updated; have time to take part in an initiative.

# Activism ecosystem

Once users are enlightened, they tend to be part of an **ecosystem**, in which causes are interrelated. They realize that the core-cause that originally brought them up to act is, actually, related to many others.

This ecosystem perspective enables the identification with a wide range of other causes and initiatives, reinforcing values of the awareness, such as **mutual benefit** and openness to new ideas.



FOR EXAMPLE : **Feminism + ecologism**: Capacity to care about women rights, adopting, at the same time, an ecologic behaviour.

# Commitment

Supporting something means to dedicate time and efforts to it, no matter how. According to our users, **commitment is essential** either it is online or offline. They emphasise that online mobilizations are powerful to provoke substantial changes as well as in-street demonstrations.

Despite that, a different type of commitment lays on being sporadic or making the activism a way of life. It makes us come back to the **first lever**: how much **do you react** to what you want to change?



**SPORADIC:** Tendency to follow the mass. In this case, the participation tend to be **impulsive, momentaneous and shared with a close circle of people.**



**FULL:** Tendency to integrate the cause in the daily live, acting with constancy. In this case, **the initiatives tend to be planned** on a larger scale.

The background of the image is a large, dense crowd of people, likely at a protest or public demonstration. The crowd is filled with individuals of various ages and ethnicities, many of whom are holding up signs and banners. The overall color palette is dominated by warm, orange-brown tones. On the right side of the image, there is a large, semi-circular graphic element in a teal color. This graphic contains a faint, dotted pattern and a small, stylized illustration of a person holding a water bottle. The text 'What means to 'raise awareness'?' is overlaid on the left side of the image in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

# What means to 'raise awareness'?

# Users' main goal is to raise awareness.

These **levers** are efforts that will thrive in producing what we call '**design dialogue in activism**', to ensure an accurate **bridge** among activists' actions and design decisions.

Once we understood the activists' motivations, we move on to identify what their **needs** are.


We heard many times that their main goal is **to raise awareness** towards causes they are supporting and consequently other initiatives they might be taking part in.

**To do that, they need to reach 3 goals to ensure other individuals will understand their message**

Under the 'raise awareness' goal, lays **3 powerful objectives** to ensure the message will trespass the borders:

- **Sensitize individuals** – make other people comprehend the reason why. Consequently, generate in other individuals the respect and tolerance for such cause or movement (they are aware the ideal scenario of a 'perfect world' is not going to happen anytime soon / or as they wished it).
- **Reach massive audience** – the respect and tolerance happen once more individuals know and 'get used to it', because it might encourage more individuals to join the movement.
- **Innovate** – Demonstrating an opinion has changed over the years. The Internet has enabled different possibilities, while increased the polarization. Due to that, activists look for ways to innovate their initiatives and messages to convey with the idea that civic participation is key to achieve changes.





**Advice to 'raise awareness' and meet the users' needs.**

# The pillars to achieve the Design Dialogue in activism

The **'raise awareness'** goals can be transformed into strategic design decisions that will help activists to accomplish their goals.

Considering such goals as a basis, we have created the **3 pillars** to achieve a **Design dialogue in activism**. The idea is to ensure that **every action** is connected to an **individual's real-life** – it means that every little piece needs to be able to inspire individuals to reflect and eventually act, contributing with the activism ecosystem.

To do that, it is necessary to create messages that convey with:

- 1 **Impact on** the daily life
- 2 **Trust,** learn and sharing
- 3 **Belonging** to a community




#1

## Impact on the daily life

*“People only wake up when they realize that something may affect the way they live”*

Individuals need to feel the cause have an impact on their daily lives, and if they don't act, the consequences will affect the way they live. The way of communicating it must be relevant to **activate the levers**, to transform it into something **emotionally close** to them.





#2

## Trust learn and sharing

*“Sometimes you share something without checking the sources... it’s a mistake, but I tend to act by impulse”*

Users need messages that **convey credibility**. In a world full of fake news, they need to be engaged by *knowledge sharing*, as well as, feel **safe in trusting the message**. With this, they pass to be a **receptor to have active participation** in delivering the message to other audience.



#3

## Belonging to a community

*“We created Twitter group accounts – because we believe it indirectly conveys with the organization, so the ideas can be powerfully spread – it’s not me saying, we are a group of people”*

Users need to acknowledge that a cause represents a **common interest** for our society, not **individual ones**. The spotlight goes on that every attitude matters – and those are necessary to make the ecosystem bigger.



**To become these pillars  
into reality we must...**

# Adopt some design decisions

Design decisions aligned with the pillars can be divided into:

## #SPEECH

- **RELIABLE** sources are crucial to inform and ensure the message can be transmitted with accuracy.
- **LEARNING** is a big and relevant part of the process. Once learnt, users feel empowered to share it. Make sure the knowledge is being transmitted.
- **CONCISENESS** together with **NATURALITY** increase the possibilities of more individuals reading and understanding it.
- **PURPOSEFUL** messages are endearing and impulse reflection, differently than a 'call to action' that might be perceived as an obligation.

## #INCLUSIVITY

- **AVOID SENSATIONALISM** and prioritise ethics. Reality must be shown, and limits must be respected.
- **MAKE IT APPEALING** in every sense – activism should be inclusive, beyond visual aspects – make sure your message reach a broad audience in every aspect.
- **USE CREATIVITY** through illustrations/sounds and work in the symbols creation to endure over time.

## #FORMAT

- Use different **SOCIAL MEDIA** for different purposes.
- **ADAPT** your message to them.
- Bet for the **RESPECT** and **TOLERANCE**.



# What we have learnt from digital activism in COVID-19 times



# Respect, Tolerance & now **Solidarity** as well

As COVID-19 is still causing a revolution in our practices and beliefs. The world turned the whole attention to the virus and the consequences of that in a variety of scopes.

The **digital activism** has been key in these times of physical distance. Beyond the **respect and tolerance**, **social solidarity** has risen as a strong factor to **mobilization**.

COVID-19 achieved something else: it made people stay in the same side to cope during the pandemic. As the days were passing by, the world start to raise awareness to many issues that worsen because of the virus.

In digital terms, we have identified 2 different approaches:

- **Institutions and companies** that promote and facilitate social actions between individuals using their audience / followers as a strong starting point.
- Individuals that felt motivated /empowered to create and participate in initiatives for a **common purpose from the beginning**. These individuals have been putting efforts in reach a bigger scale / at the same time, many of them succeed / exponentially increased.

Digital activism in COVID-19 times has shown us the difference between now and before. It has changed the perception of 'asking for help' to use your abilities and tools, in a very personal way, to offer good experiences to other people. It helped us to put ourselves in other individual's shoes and quickly understand that to act is necessary to design a better world.

# Examples of mutual Aid / solidarity design

Institutions and companies



Countries



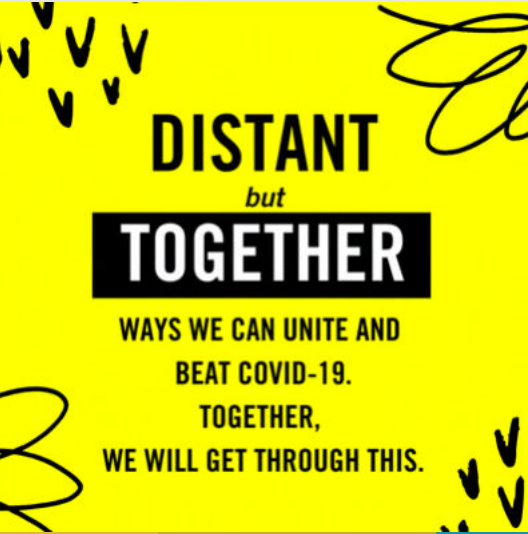
# Examples of mutual Aid



Casa Nostra Casa Vostra



Instagram



Amnistia



Illustration by Na Kim

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# #thanks