

# Introduction

## Networks, social movements and their myths in a hyperconnected world

Redes, movimientos sociales y sus mitos en un mundo hiperconectado

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Almost a century ago, Marshall McLuhan (McLuhan & McLuhan, 1992) enunciated his law of retrieval, in which he described that every media always recovers a previously lost medium. As in a process of rebalancing, the great innovative forms of social communication tend to resort deeply to the old forms of communication, with which they establish a dialogue that increases the effectiveness of the new ones, connecting with the first, and most persistent ones, used by man. Through this connection, the ancestral forms and the most modern forms of communication go hand in hand and flow into the future.

It is not necessary to investigate the extent to which McLuhan's insights are crucial to understand what is happening in the world of digital media. McLuhan's law of retrieval, or re-mediation (Bolter & Grusin, 2005), can be very easily exemplified if we take a look at the current issue, number 68, of *Comunicar*. The ancient language of myths and symbols abounds in social networks. The language of myth, and its symbolic representation, emerges in the iconography and aesthetics of the so-called digital language of new media. It is not difficult to find, whether in superficial, infantilized or, on the contrary, in deep forms full of their primordial force, the great mythical symbols and the deep rooted archetypes. The messages on the digital networks and platforms are populated with myths and symbols; and in them the world of unfathomable human meanings returns, transformed by the kaleidoscope of creativity of the net.

Focusing this issue of *Comunicar* on the topic of social digital movements, we have come across a totally innovative subject. We have connected the world of myths and social movements in digital networks, currently expanding around the globe. Social networks are becoming the field of action of a new political dimension, in which the fight for essential freedoms and rights takes a direct, simple, but also powerful form. To call to the activist struggle, the language of social media uses myths, symbols and forms of deep language from the cultural heritage, bringing them new life. It is only necessary to pay a little attention, to see how in the messages of the social movements the world of symbolic myths emerges in all its complex depth.

*Comunicar* journal gives us the opportunity to address an absolutely original topic, which reveals how the evocative language of myths in specific and various dimensions, is the ideal vehicle to appeal to social action, producing a dynamic, creative digital communication, which is quickly accepted by users. They make it their means of identification and their key to commitment. What has caught our attention most, when compiling the contributions of different research groups in this issue of *Comunicar*, is how the communicative creativity of social media has become the way to demonstrate the energy and dynamic force of collectives fighting for a social cause, be it feminism, ecology, freedom of expression and thought, or the fight against racism and xenophobia.

In the movements and groups that are active in social networks, through different content dissemination platforms, creativity is the indication of their strength when it comes to taking action. Thus, the viral nature of creative

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forms is the sign of the capacity for action in favor of a universal citizen interest. And when symbols, heroes and myths emerge in recent anti-racist revolts, or in the movement against climate change, evoked in the images, language or messages of these mobilizations, these movements create a force of expression that provides feedback, and that resorts to the universal language of myth. Thus, through the intense development of the Internet social movements' language, social media connect with the citizens, who today are also creators and modifiers of these languages and slogans. In that phenomenon, a new use of myths and symbols is transmitted. Political and social manifestations of the new digital citizens are marked by a collective creativity in



which very deep and fundamental forms of communication appear. This is one of the tremendously interesting features that emerge in this thematic issue. The latest technology and old myths go hand in hand on the web.

The way in which activist user communities on social platforms recognize each other and transmit dynamic energy is through collective expression created by all. There is a communication that is disseminated and transformed by anonymous senders, that goes viral through the self-recognition of a community that produces this brand-new expressive language. This factor is probably completely original and new, because in the collective language that creates new forms, and new subjects for enunciation, activists recognize their ability to change the world. Thus, this recent means of communication joins the ancestral struggle for human emancipation, just as the mass media of yesterday fought for the advancement of democracy and the establishment of civil liberties. Once again, the media are at the origin of the fight for new freedoms. In this case, it is about digital media, and the new freedoms are demanded by collective, anonymous, cooperative individuals.

Myths are reborn and brought back with force in that incessant search for collective communication. They fight for the values of the political, and not for the issues of politics, as in Eric Landowski's recent accurate distinction (Landowski, 2004). The new social world returns to the essential principles of human dignity, related to essential freedoms and the ideal conditions for life on the planet. Far from the agendas of conventional politics, digital social causes also engage young people in political matters that are crucial to them.

One of the most interesting aspects, therefore, lies in the capacity that the digital medium has, generating communities of progressive action, to convene and unite large masses of individuals. Above all the digital medium involves new generations, that show a greater identification with the languages of digital movements. Today's young people from all over the planet manifest a serious disenchantment with the ways of intervening and participating in political structures, and yet they are very active and deeply participatory in the emerging digital social movements that come to liberate aspects of social life still linked with repression, poverty, threat or abuse. It is very interesting that in the liberating impulse manifested by the characteristic languages of digital platforms, deep myths, and archetypes, as those forms of reconciling ourselves with the conditions of our existence, according to the greatest researcher of the myths, are again present. In the deep pedagogy that Campbell (2016) insisted that myths generated, there is a fundamental purpose of inserting the individual into a community: That each individual can try to encompass the deep

abyss of his own existence, integrating himself into a collective. It is logical, therefore, that myths are the ideal vehicle for social movements.

The Internet is being criticized by highly successful analysts who show how, from the 2.0 Web generation and commercial platforms' universe, the drift towards superficiality and the loss of communicative meaning is a fact. The Internet has evolved, in many of its developments, towards a superficial data monetization system, whose sole purpose is to support the platforms and large corporations that work in the gigantic informational commerce system. And yet, as a counterpoint of balance, in the spontaneous demonstrations of citizens who use the networks to give force to activism movements, the net retains its original capacity as a medium, to make citizens feel the free power to change the world, the strength to take the streets to act for common interests and for the future.

As in a process of rebalancing, then, this monographic issue shows us the positive side of social networks. It exposes the liberating functions they have, alternatively to the main use of social media in the globalized commercial system. And those great digital movements with their distinctive languages appear as a testament to the possibilities that networks can unfold.

That is why the investigations that appear in this number 68 of *Comunicar* transmit a positive energy, manifested through multiple phenomena. We want to describe the contributions that have been selected to give an idea of these original aspects. The article that opens this issue, entitled "The hero and the shadow: Myths in digital social movements", develops a mixed method to analyze the concept of hero present in two freedom of expression movements of great impact, past and present: "Anonymous" and "Je suis Charlie", which stand out for their communicative strength, their digital nature and their international character. Miller, Aladro-Vico and Requeijo-Rey apply the hero's journey model, as defined by Jung and Campbell, to identify the presence of the myth of the shadow and its anonymous, hybrid and dark identity in both movements. They create a wide verbal-visual encyclopedia and a community of meaning. They act as a macro-narrative in which the individual identity nests in social identity, which refers to universal values that allow human beings to transcend, by overcoming their temporal limits.

In the second text, the analysis of the presence of myth in another movement with several centuries of history is essential to understand the current socio-political context: feminism. Through the analysis of the archetypes of characters from 25 feminist Netflix and HBO series, Garrido and Zapsti study the impact of the demands of the "Me Too" and "Time's Up" movements when it comes to promoting gender equality. They find that the female characters in these fictions are more complex and diverse than their predecessors, as they challenge gender stereotypes and expand typical archetypes. The protagonists label some of their experiences as sexual abuse and represent alternative views regarding the construction of female sexual desire and pleasure. They are highly useful texts for coeducation and the development of egalitarian attitudes in young people since their characters invite us to reflect on the functioning of power and oppression.

The third investigation also deals with another essential movement in the political universe of our century: environmentalism. In this case, the object of study is the social media discourses of a person and a movement that, in a *sinedcoque*, have concentrated the main demands of climate activism today: Greta Thunberg and "Fridays for Future" (FFF). Applying the hero's monomyth, "From global myth to local mobilization: Creation and resonance of the Greta Thunberg framework" provides detail on how the construction of the storytelling of the young activist responds to the stages of the model exposed by Campbell. Díaz-Pérez and Soler-i-Martí discuss how the archetypal journey of the hero is essential to the impact of the figure of Thunberg who, in turn, is responsible for the success of "Fridays for Future" (FFF). This case study, like those that analyze the previous articles of the thematic issue, proves the power of myth when it comes to connecting the individual with the universal. The agenda of the climate movement is personalized in Thunberg, but the construction of her history from the monomyth of the hero and the global dynamics of digital social movements decisively influence the international success of climate activism and the impact on its followers.

Next, the fourth contribution develops a panoramic view of the research in the field. It systematically reviews the empirical articles on digital activist movements, using virtual ethnography as a methodology, published by the Spanish sociology journals with the highest impact factor in the last decade. Rodríguez-Suárez, Morán-Neches and Herrero-Olaizola point out that the Internet is an ally of activism, since it allows it to expand the impact of its demands, creates new narratives and transforms the language of the different movements. They note the scarcity of publications on this subject, as well as the growing use of virtual ethnography as a research tool in this field.

Finally, in "The myth in the visual narratives of environmental activism on Instagram", Ardèvol and Martorell identify the mythological structures present in the memes created, published or shared by different eco-influencers.

These texts are myths that incorporate their own model of producing meaning, challenging the appeal to mobilize, and thus triggering social change. At the rhetorical level, they respond to a contrast operation framed in time: they pose binary oppositions between past and future. As with the discourse generated on Twitter by “Anonymous” and “Je suis Charlie” in the first investigation, here the memes also produce an extensive encyclopedia that, as a macro-narrative, fits the individual plane into the universal one by framing environmental activism as part of the cosmic order.

We hope that this issue of *Comunicar* will provide a sufficiently varied and rich set of perspectives to give an idea of the present multiple research possibilities. These possibilities are present in social movements energized by social networks, when it comes to promoting profound forms of communication such as those present in the world of myths.

Finally, we want to thank the excellent working team of this journal for its human quality, its quality as an editorial group and its professional expertise, which has allowed us to contribute such an innovative and original topic with the guarantees provided by its impact as a publication of first international level. We hope that this issue can help to show that Spanish research in communication is at very high levels and is capable of consolidating itself in the dissemination of research advances in this field. We believe that the internationality of the authors that appear in this issue, and the diffusion that the publication itself has throughout the globe, will increase interest in this topic, being as it is completely specific and innovative, but deserving, we think, of continued attention in the academic community. Undoubtedly, these are aspects full of meaning, and that will influence the active present human groups, in the new communication technologies of our era.

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