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Contested voices: an analysis of the reach and narratives constructed around the 2025 Black Women's March in Rio de Janeiro

Vozes em disputa: uma análise do alcance e das narrativas construídas sobre a Marcha das Mulheres Pretas do Rio de Janeiro em 2025

Voces en disputa: un análisis del alcance y de las narrativas construidas sobre la Marcha de las Mujeres Negras de Río de Janeiro en 2025

Inês Maria Azevedo do Nascimento – ines.anasc@gmail.com

Abstract: This article investigates discursive production and digital engagement on the Instagram profile of the Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras (AMB—Articulation of Brazilian Women) during the cycle of the Black Women's March in Rio de Janeiro. Its main objective is to analyze how the movement used the social network to construct autonomous narratives of mobilization, visibility, and political self-definition. The methodology adopts a quantitative approach by mapping interaction metrics for 10 posts published between November 17 and 28. The theoretical framework is grounded in Political Communication, Cultural Studies, and Black Feminism. The results reveal a significant rise in engagement: posts increased from 17 likes during the call-to-action phase to a peak of 168 likes on the day of the March (November 25) and maintained 134 likes during the consolidation stage (November 28). The study concludes that the peak response to images of the in-person event reflects the success of an oppositional encoding based on agency, ancestry, and the concept of "Bem Viver" (Good Living), establishing the profile as an arena of cultural resistance and counter-narrative.
Keywords: Digital activism; Black Feminism; Instagram; Black Women's March.

Resumo: Este artigo investiga a produção discursiva e o engajamento digital no perfil da Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras (AMB) no Instagram durante o ciclo da Marcha das Mulheres Pretas do Rio de Janeiro. O objetivo principal é analisar como o movimento utilizou a rede social para construir narrativas autônomas de mobilização, visibilidade e autodefinição política. A metodologia adota uma abordagem quantitativa, com o mapeamento das métricas de interação de 10 publicações veiculadas entre 17 e 28 de novembro. A fundamentação teórica ancora-se na Comunicação Política, nos Estudos Culturais e no Feminismo Negro. Os resultados revelam uma evolução expressiva no engajamento: as postagens evoluíram de 17 curtidas na fase de convocatória para um pico de 168 curtidas no dia da Marcha (25/11) e sustentaram 134 curtidas na etapa de consolidação (28/11). Conclui-se que o pico de adesão às imagens do ato presencial reflete o sucesso de uma codificação oposicional baseada no protagonismo, na ancestralidade e no "Bem Viver", consolidando o perfil como uma arena de resistência cultural e contranarrativa.
Palavras-chave: Ativismo digital; Feminismo Negro; Instagram; Marcha das Mulheres Pretas.

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Resumen: Este artículo investiga la producción discursiva y la participación digital en el perfil de Instagram de la Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras (AMB—Articulación de Mujeres Brasileñas) durante el ciclo de la Marcha de las Mujeres Negras de Río de Janeiro. El objetivo principal es analizar cómo el movimiento utilizó la red social para construir narrativas autónomas de movilización, visibilidad y autodefinición política. La metodología adopta un enfoque cuantitativo, con el mapeo de las métricas de interacción de 10 publicaciones difundidas entre el 17 y el 28 de noviembre. El marco teórico se sustenta en la Comunicación Política, los Estudios Culturales y el Feminismo Negro. Los resultados revelan una evolución expresiva de la participación: las publicaciones pasaron de 17 “me gusta” en la fase de convocatoria a un pico de 168 el día de la Marcha (25/11) y mantuvieron 134 en la etapa de consolidación (28/11). Se concluye que el pico de adhesión a las imágenes del acto presencial refleja el éxito de una codificación oposicional basada en el protagonismo, la ancestralidad y el “Buen Vivir”, consolidando el perfil como un espacio de resistencia cultural y contranarrativa.
Palabras clave: Activismo digital; Feminismo Negro; Instagram; Marcha de las Mujeres Negras.

1. Introduction

The reconfiguration of the contemporary public sphere, driven by technological mediation and digital platforms, has profoundly altered the dynamics of visibility and the communication strategies of social movements. The Black Women's March held in Rio de Janeiro goes beyond the physical occupation of urban space and unfolds into a dense territory of cultural, symbolic, and narrative disputes in the digital environment.

From the perspective of Cultural Studies, social media do not operate as merely neutral channels of transmission, but as living arenas for the production, circulation, and contestation of meanings. In the digital ecosystem, platforms become strategic spaces for cultural politics and self-definition, where activism produces its own representations, disputes collective memory, and constructs autonomous meanings concerning the fight against structural racism, reproductive justice, and the promotion of “Bem Viver” (Good Living).

Against this background, this article investigates how the institutional Instagram profile of the Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras (AMB—Articulation of Brazilian Women) operated as a space of discursive resistance and narrative construction during the mobilization cycle of the Black Women's March in Rio de Janeiro. The study seeks to understand how the Black women's movement appropriates digital tools to exercise the right to self-definition, setting the public debate according to its own language and political frames of reference.

To achieve this objective, the research analytically seeks to:

Map and examine the reach, engagement, and repercussions of AMB's Instagram posts throughout the mobilization cycle;

The relevance of the study lies in understanding how Black women's activism uses digital media to assert its agendas autonomously, consolidating social networks as arenas of cultural resistance, disputes over memory, and guarantees of the right to recognition in the contemporary public sphere.

2. Theoretical framework

To analyze the discursive production, mobilization, and self-representation constructed on the Instagram profile of the Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras (AMB) on the occasion of the Black Women's March, this study is grounded in the intersection of three conceptual fields: Political Communication, Cultural Studies, and Ethnic-Racial Studies, with emphasis on the framework of Black Feminism.

2.1. Political communication and the digital public sphere: networked activism and counterpublics

In the field of Political Communication, technological transformations have reconfigured power dynamics and information flows in the contemporary public sphere. As Manuel Castells observes, the emergence of the "network society" and "mass self-communication" has enabled social movements to bypass traditional institutional and media channels, building mobilization networks based on discursive autonomy. Digital media cease to be merely operational tools and become territories of direct political action.

This reconfiguration makes possible the consolidation of what Nancy Fraser conceptualizes as subaltern counterpublics: parallel discursive arenas in which historically marginalized groups formulate counter-discourses, redefine their identities, and articulate demands that challenge the consensuses of the hegemonic public sphere. In the digital ecosystem, social networking platforms—such as Instagram—function as communication infrastructures where these counterpublics gain scale and visibility.

Furthermore, the analysis of networked activism draws on the contributions of Ilse Scherer-Warren and Maria da Glória Gohn, who show how social movement networks operate through multilevel articulations. Contemporary mobilizations do not end with the physical occupation of the streets; they unfold into continuous communication ecosystems in which digital engagement, the use of hashtags, and the action of amplifiers form a political-pedagogical dimension of awareness-building and social pressure.

2.2. Cultural studies: meaning production, encoding, and disputes over representation

While Political Communication sheds light on the structuring of the public sphere and mobilization, Cultural Studies provide the basis for understanding processes of political signification. Grounded in the tradition of the Birmingham School, particularly in Stuart Hall's formulations, culture is understood as a shifting terrain of symbolic struggle for hegemony.

In his Encoding/Decoding model, Hall argues that communication practices produce meanings that are never fixed or neutral. Content production by social actors involves encoding messages saturated with ideology, while reception may generate aligned, negotiated, or openly oppositional readings. The discursive production of a social movement on Instagram constitutes a political practice of oppositional encoding that challenges the dominant meanings produced about the Black population.

From the perspective of Latin American Cultural Studies, authors such as Jesús Martín-Barbero and Néstor García Canclini emphasize that communication must be analyzed through cultural mediations and popular appropriations of technical media. In the digital context, AMB's profile acts as a hub for the production of cultural politics: posts (texts, images, and videos) operate as cultural artifacts that contest narratives, construct collective memories, and assign new meanings to central concepts such as citizenship, rights, and “Bem Viver” (Good Living).

2.3. Ethnic-racial studies and Black Feminism: intersectionality, self-definition, and the matrix of domination

The political and theoretical substance of the Black Women's March is grounded in Ethnic-Racial Studies and Black Feminist theory. The analytical category of intersectionality, systematized by Kimberlé Crenshaw and expanded in Brazil by authors such as Lélia Gonzalez and Sueli Carneiro, shows that the axes of oppression related to race, gender, and class do not operate separately, but overlap and are inseparable.

In Latin America, Lélia Gonzalez formulated the notion of Amefricanity and denounced racism and sexism as forces that confined Black women to subordinate positions in the social structure and the media. To break with this erasure, sociologist Patricia Hill Collins highlights the concept of self-definition: the political act of rejecting the “controlling images” produced by dominant culture and autonomously constructing a consciousness and self-image based on one's own historical and ancestral experience.

Ano VII, v.1 2026 | submissão: 13/08/2026 | aceito: 16/08/2026 | publicação: 19/08/2026

In the context of digital communication, the search for self-definition becomes a concrete discursive practice. As Silvio Almeida points out in conceptualizing structural racism, social institutions and languages carry consolidated racial biases. Thus, the occupation of networks by Black feminism operates as an exercise in decolonizing thought and discourse. AMB's Instagram therefore becomes a space of speech in which Black women move from being objects of someone else's narrative to becoming political and epistemic subjects of their own history.

3. Materials and methods

The study adopts a quantitative approach aligned with the paradigm of Cultural Studies and Political Communication, combining network engagement metrics. The investigation focuses on the communication output of the official Instagram profile of the Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras (AMB), @ambfeminista, during the mobilization cycle of the Black Women's March in Rio de Janeiro.

The time frame covers November 17 to 28, totaling 12 days of continuous observation. This window is justified by its political and symbolic density:

Call-to-action and Mobilization Cycle (November 17–19): captures the ferment preceding Black Consciousness Day (November 20), a crucial milestone for intensifying calls to action, logistical guidance, and political alignment for the March.

The Event and Immediate Repercussions (November 20–28): follows the real-time coverage of the March in the streets of Rio de Janeiro and the subsequent eight days, making it possible to analyze the sustainability of digital narratives, engagement peaks, shares, and the repercussions of its agendas across the network.

The research corpus consists of all posts published in the feed of AMB's Instagram profile (Reels, carousels, and static posts) over these 12 days, together with their respective engagement metrics and user comments.

4. Data analysis and discussion

The Data Analysis section is organized into three axes that connect the empirical data collected between November 17 and 28 to the theoretical references adopted:

Ano VII, v.1 2026 | submissão: 13/08/2026 | aceito: 16/08/2026 | publicação: 19/08/2026

4.1. Reach, networks, and amplifiers: AMB's networked activism (November 17–28)

This first axis analyzes the structural and quantitative dimension of AMB's political communication on Instagram over the 12-day period, showing how the movement acted as an articulating hub in the digital public sphere.

Engagement Curve and Mobilization Peaks: mapping the flow of interactions during the period. Engagement increased between November 17 and 19 (preparatory phase), reached its highest point on November 20, and maintained a high volume of shares and saves in follow-up posts (November 21–28).

Amplification Networks and Central Nodes: identification of the main agents retransmitting content within the investigated window. The analysis shows that the March's repercussions connected AMB's profile to a network of social movements (Scherer-Warren; Gohn), involving Black influencers, parliamentarians, and collectives from peripheral communities.

4.3. Self-definition and intersectionality in the November narratives

The third axis investigates the political-epistemic content of the narratives published between November 17 and 28, evaluating the application of Black Feminist frameworks.

Intersectionality as a Structuring Axis: analysis of the captions published during the period shows that issues such as environmental justice, combating violence, and reproductive rights were presented as inseparable, revealing the overlap of race, gender, and class (Gonzalez; Crenshaw).

Deconstructing “Controlling Images” and Exercising Self-Definition: the posts published during the Black Consciousness cycle acted as a rejection of narratives of subordination. By foregrounding “Bem Viver” (Good Living), AMB's content reaffirmed Black women as proponents of a civilizational project (Collins; Carneiro).

Constructing the Political Subject: the collection of posts from November 17 to 28 becomes a record of memory and an affirmation of rights in which Black women exercise their place of speech in the digital public sphere.

4. Results and discussion

Call-to-action and base-building (November 17–21)

In AMB's exclusively institutional posts published in the days preceding the March, organic engagement grew gradually: from 17 likes (November 17) and 28 likes (November 18), to 51 likes (November 19), stabilizing at 72 and 71 likes in the two posts of November 21. This phase served to align the profile's established base politically and informationally.

2. The event peak and the power of Collab (November 25—the day of the March)

November 25 concentrated the peak of mobilization and recorded the highest numbers of likes in the period:

Post 1 (Gathering): 76 likes

Post 2 (Occupation/Demonstration): 168 likes (absolute peak)—published as a Collab with the Black Women's March

Post 3 (Street Records): 132 likes—published as a Collab with the Black Women's March

Use of the Collab feature with the official @Marcha de Mulheres Negras page proved to be the main tactical strategy for network amplification (Gohn; Scherer-Warren). By bringing the audiences of both pages together in a single post, the movement expanded the message's reach, producing a 900% increase in engagement for Post 2 compared with the initial post (November 17).

3. Post-event narrative sustainability (November 27 and 28)

After a decline on November 27 (34 likes), the profile recorded a new peak of 134 likes on November 28—a post also published in collaboration with the Black Women's March. Returning to the Collab format after the event extended the narrative's life and consolidated the March's political developments across the network.

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4.2. Discursive strategies and cultural politics: the audience's passive reading

Analyzing the data through the lens of Cultural Studies (Hall; Martín-Barbero), the combination of high peaks in likes and the complete absence of comments reveals distinctive aspects of audience reception in the digital ecosystem:

Analysis of interaction volume revealed an engagement curve grounded in the logic of mass self-communication (Castells) and networked activism (Gohn; Scherer-Warren). The flow of engagement across the period's 10 posts shows three clearly defined phases:

1. Call-to-action and pedagogical mobilization phase (November 17–21)

In the days preceding the March, engagement grew progressively: from 17 likes (November 17) to 28 (November 18), 51 (November 19), and finally two posts on November 21 with 72 and 71 likes.

This gradual growth demonstrates the profile's effectiveness in warming up the network, operating as an informational and pedagogical channel that prepared the audience to occupy public space.

2. The event peak: the event-post (November 25—the day of the March)

November 25 concentrated the largest number of posts (three publications) and recorded the greatest density of engagement in the period analyzed:

Post 1: 76 likes (guidance/start of the gathering)

Post 2: 168 likes (absolute peak of the period)

Post 3: 132 likes

The second post on November 25 represented an increase of almost 1,000% in engagement compared with the initial day (November 17). This phenomenon illustrates how the image of Black women occupying the streets generates emotional and political contagion in the network, transforming the post into an artifact of immediate identity affirmation.

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3. Narrative sustainability and reverberation (November 27 and 28)

After a technical decline on November 27 (34 likes), the profile recorded another significant peak on November 28, with 134 likes.

This recovery shows that the March's impact on the digital ecosystem did not end on the day of the event: the consolidation, synthesis, or political follow-up content published on November 28 retained a very high capacity to attract attention and be shared.

4.2. Discursive strategies and cultural politics: the dispute over meanings

The distribution of likes across the period's 10 posts makes it possible to apply Stuart Hall's Encoding/Decoding model to understand acceptance of AMB's discursive strategies:

Adherence to the Oppositional Code: the peaks of 168 likes (November 25) and 134 likes (November 28) reflect the successful encoding of the event through agency, ancestry, and celebration, rejecting traditional media frames that prioritize conflict or urban disruption.

The Street Image as a Vector of Engagement: the posts with the highest engagement were precisely those that recorded the in-person demonstration—the Black body in motion occupying urban space. Cultural politics (Martín-Barbero) operated here by converting the street aesthetic into a digital aesthetic, generating identification and strong affective appeal among readers and supporters.

4.3. Self-definition and intersectionality: the discursive practice of Black Feminism

From the perspective of Ethnic-Racial Studies and Black Feminism, the distribution of engagement data reaffirms the centrality of self-definition (Collins):

Subject of Speech and Recognition: AMB's 10 posts functioned as a political diary in which the movement itself set out its claims. The most-liked posts on the day of the March (November 25) and after the event (November 28) show that the audience responds most intensely to content in which the language of intersectionality (Gonzalez; Crenshaw) is translated into images of strength, leadership, and the proposal of “Bem Viver” (Good Living).

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From Transmission to Identity Validation: the variation in engagement—from 17 likes during the call-to-action to more than 160 likes at the height of the March—shows that AMB used social networks not merely to issue notices, but to publicly validate the existence, struggle, and political project of Black women in public space.

Summary table for the period (November 17–28)

Date	Post no.	Likes	Cycle phase	Dominant analysis category
Nov. 17	Post 1	17	Initial call-to-action	Preparing the ground/Base engagement
Nov. 18	Post 2	28	Call-to-action	Building repertoires and awareness
Nov. 19	Post 3	51	Call-to-action	Continuous growth of network expectations
Nov. 21	Post 4	72	Immediate pre-event	Eve-of-event mobilization (support networks)
Nov. 21	Post 5	71	Immediate pre-event	Pedagogical reinforcement and guidance
Nov. 25	Post 6	76	Day of the March	Gathering and final call-to-action
Nov. 25	Post 7	168	Day of the March (peak)	Oppositional encoding/Street aesthetics
Nov. 25	Post 8	132	Day of the March	Celebration, affection, and political visibility
Nov. 27	Post 9	34	Post-event	Interim assessment/Network pause
Nov. 28	Post 10	134	Post-event (consolidation)	Self-definition/Memory and developments

5. Final considerations

This study investigated the activity of the official Instagram profile of the Articulação de Mulheres Brasileiras (AMB), @ambfeminista, during the mobilization cycle of the Black Women's March in Rio de Janeiro, covering November 17 to 28. By articulating Political Communication, Cultural Studies, and Black Feminism, it sought to understand how the appropriation of digital media enabled the construction of an autonomous narrative of mobilization, visibility, and political self-definition.

The empirical data demonstrated the profile's effectiveness as an infrastructure for mass self-communication (Castells) and as an arena for the emergence of subaltern counterpublics (Fraser). The engagement curve—which rose from 17 likes during the initial call-to-action (November 17) to an absolute peak of 168 likes on the day of the March (November 25) and maintained 134 likes after the event (November 28)—reveals a planned communication cycle with strong identity appeal. The support network gradually came together, transforming the platform into a pedagogical space for mobilization and, later, a living archive celebrating the occupation of public space.

Ano VII, v.1 2026 | submissão: 13/08/2026 | aceito: 16/08/2026 | publicação: 19/08/2026

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