

Opportunities for social activism in transformative service research: a research agenda

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Opportunities for social activism in transformative service research: A research agenda

Abstract

Purpose – This paper highlights the potential of social activism – defined as a public act that aims to challenge the status quo by bringing alternative views or narratives to the debate - in transformative service research and proposes a future research agenda.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper builds upon a review of social activism in the management and communications literature to identify its potential for social change in service (eco)systems.

Findings – This paper outlines three ways in which social activism can influence companies (external activism, internal activism, and activism as organizational practice) and illustrates how they can be used to advance transformative service research in selected priority areas.

Research implications – This paper develops a future research agenda and suggests research questions that could guide scholarly inquiry at the intersection of social activism and transformative service research

Practical implications – For managers and policy makers, this paper highlights how social activism can influence companies' attempts to drive social change.

Originality/value – This paper is among the first to link social activism and transformative service research and highlight novel research opportunities at their intersection.

Keywords Social activism, Transformative service research, social change, well-being, social impact

Paper type Conceptual paper

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Introduction

Transformative service research that aims to institute social change which improves individual and societal well-being has become a key priority in contemporary service scholarship (Anderson and Oström, 2015; Previte and Robertson, 2019; Oström *et al.*, 2021). At the heart of transformations in service systems are usually complex and wide-reaching social issues, that are contested between different actors or actor groups (Skålen *et al.*, 2015). Such issues can manifest in and between many levels in service systems, and range from, for example, vulnerable consumers to employee well-being, and corporate social responsibility to environmental pollution and climate change (Anderson *et al.*, 2013).

It is well-established that to address complex social issues and drive positive transformation, service systems need actors that are both willing and able to challenge the status quo, and initiate change by persuading other actors (individual and collective) to adopt new practices (Ritvala and Salmi, 2010). Such transformations are often more broadly embedded in social change processes that emerge when traditional norms are no longer successful in providing satisfactory behavior, structures, and institutions (Della Porta and Diani, 2020). To foster support for alternative views and narratives, any major change process requires successful communication strategies that are able to mobilize the needed action for change (e.g., Johansson and Heide, 2008; Kaplan, 2008). However, while previous service research has broadly considered how diverse actors in service systems, including individual consumers, organizations, and broader communities and networks, can drive social change and ecosystem transformation (Anderson *et al.*, 2013; Anderson and Oström, 2015), it has focused less on specific and underlying activities that different actors can adopt to drive social change. One such activity, which is increasingly prevalent and influential, yet underexplored in the contemporary service space, is social activism (Mirabito and Berry, 2015; Skålen *et al.*, 2015).

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Social activism refers to actions that aim to remedy perceived social problems by challenging the status quo, and it plays a fundamental role in shaping societal norms and practices (Atkinson, 2017; Briscoe and Gupta, 2016). Activism is a powerful, often highly visible, and a very communicative form of action, as it can employ tactics such as advocacy, protest, and boycotts to spark public interest and mobilize resources (Atkinson, 2017; Taylor and Van Dyke, 2004). Alternatively, social activism can adopt collaborative means of influence such as cooperation and consulting, which are often less public and less confrontational, aiming instead for a shared agenda (Arenas *et al.*, 2009; Austin, 2003; den Hond and de Bakker, 2007). Especially in the modern communication environment, which is pervaded by various and ever-growing digital and social media channels, activist initiatives and movements have the potential to spread rapidly, even in the absence of official governance and organizational structures (Skålen *et al.*, 2015; Boyd *et al.*, 2016). To build momentum for their causes, activists typically use communication strategies that aim to raise awareness for an issue and mobilize action to address it (Snow and Benford, 1988).

While activism is well-studied in the management (Briscoe and Gupta, 2016; den Hond and de Bakker, 2007; Mäkelä and Olkkonen, 2021) and communications literatures (e.g., Ciszek and Logan, 2018; Rim *et al.*, 2020), it has received far less attention in service research (for exceptions, see Mirabito and Berry, 2015; Skålen *et al.*, 2015). This is surprising, given that activism is well-aligned with the goals of transformative service research (Anderson *et al.*, 2013), and can be used or influenced by all actors in service ecosystems.

Consequently, to draw attention to the role of activism in transforming service systems, and bridge the service management and social activism literatures, the purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the state-of-the-art in social activism research and highlight priority areas in the contemporary service research that offer underexplored opportunities for activism to drive transformation and social change. We summarize our insights in a research

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3 agenda that highlights fruitful research opportunities and potential research questions at the
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5 crossroads of activism and service research. Overall, this article contributes to the
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7 contemporary service management research by highlighting the important role of social
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9 activism in transforming service (eco)systems and providing a guiding agenda for future
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11 research.
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17 **Overview of social activism in management and communication studies**

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19 Social activism is by definition a public act that often aims to challenge the status quo by raising
20
21 alternative views or narratives to the debate, and it has a fundamental role in shaping social and
22
23 political discourse that ultimately shapes societies (Atkinson, 2017). Social activism is
24
25 typically a public and a communicative activity, and while the tactics of activism can vary from
26
27 advocacy, protest, conflict, and acts of transgression against prevailing norms or laws, the aim
28
29 of activism is to spark public interest and mobilize resources (Atkinson, 2017; Taylor and Van
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31 Dyke, 2004; Tilly, 2002).
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36 In management studies, and more specifically in research fields such as corporate
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38 social responsibility (CSR) and business and society, social activism has been studied as a force
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40 appearing “in and around organizations”, as both external and internal actors can deploy it in
41
42 seeking to push companies towards greater sustainability and responsibility (Briscoe and
43
44 Gupta, 2016, p. 2). Lately, the distinction between external and internal activism has been
45
46 complemented with activism that is directly employed by business actors such as top
47
48 executives, brands, and entire organizations publicly expressing their stance on socio-political
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50 issues, even when those have little to do with the core business (Chatterji and Toffel, 2019;
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52 Gulbrandsen *et al.*, 2020; Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020).
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57 In this section, we briefly outline three ways in which activism can influence
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59 companies: ‘outside-in’ pressure where external activists seek to influence companies, ‘inside-
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3 in' pressure where internal activists such as employees seek to influence companies, and
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5 'inside-out' pressure where activism becomes an organizational practice. We summarize
6
7 central definitions and highlight how these three practices vary in terms of agency, focus, and
8
9 communication strategies (see Table 1).
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12 13 *Outside-in: Activism as external pressure*

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15 When activism arises as an external force to companies, it is typically perceived as a
16
17 counterforce to corporate power (e.g., den Hond and de Bakker, 2007). External activist
18
19 pressure is exerted on companies by actors who are not members of the target companies, such
20
21 as formalized NGOs that focus on some key causes, or more loosely organized pressure groups
22
23 or social movements that have successfully mobilized citizens or consumers who relate to the
24
25 cause (Briscoe and Gupta, 2016; den Hond and de Bakker, 2007; Doh and Guay, 2006;
26
27 Reinecke and Ansari, 2016; Waldron *et al.*, 2020). As such, the actors engaging in activism are
28
29 external to the company, yet seek to directly influence company practices, policies or
30
31 governance, exerting 'outside-in' pressure. From the organization's perspective, "dealing" with
32
33 external activists can be considered a part of the company's concerns, relationship or
34
35 stakeholder management (e.g., Doh and Guay, 2006; Taylor *et al.*, 2003), or non-market
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37 strategies (e.g., Delmas and Toffel, 2008), whereby companies aim to build societal acceptance
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39 primarily for their own actions.
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46 External activists typically use communication strategies that aim to make their claims
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48 urgent and public, as they lack direct power and voice within the organization (Briscoe and
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50 Gupta, 2016). Typical tactics used by external activists include public protest campaigns,
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52 boycotts and buycotts (den Hond and de Bakker, 2007). Hence, the communication strategies
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54 can be disruptive and deliberately confrontational, such as anti-advertisements that are meant
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56 to cause damage to the target organization (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Tilly, 2002). However,
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58 communication strategies that aim for public naming, shaming and blaming are not the only
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3 ways to seek change. NGOs in particular have developed alternative ways to influence
4 organizations by collaborating with companies and coaching them toward a more sustainable
5 path (e.g., Arenas *et al.*, 2009). When external activists collaborate with companies, the
6 communication tactics are prone to be less public, and instead rely more on soft tactics and
7 interpersonal communication that offer the target organization the possibility to develop and
8 thus gain from the collaboration (den Hond and de Bakker, 2007). Furthermore, the outward
9 communication in collaboration partnerships is typically crafted together between the activists
10 and the company, and they highlight the achievements made or pursued together (Austin,
11 2003).

12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 *Inside-in: Activism as internal pressure*

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27 When activism takes place internally, members of the target organization such as groups of
28 employees aim to push their own organization towards more responsible practices (Briscoe and
29 Gupta, 2016; Girschik, 2020). As such, internal activists exert ‘inside-in’ pressure on
30 companies, as they demand change from within that very organization where they are members.

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Internal activism can be initiated, for example, by individual employees in certain key
positions, such as CSR managers (Wickert and De Bakker, 2018) or communication
professionals, (Holtzhausen and Voto, 2002), who successfully mobilize larger grassroots
movements of employee activism. Internal activists may be driven by, for example, personal
values (Wickert and De Bakker, 2018), or through their work as boundary spanners between
the organization and its external stakeholders (Holtzhausen and Voto, 2002). As they lack the
executive power to directly make the decision to change, internal activists often need to seek
support for their issues from both lower- and upper-level members of the organization, in an
attempt to mobilize others to push existing practices and policies towards sustainability and
responsibility (Bansal, 2003; Wickert and De Bakker, 2018). While internal activists’ efforts
might include some form of internal campaigning, the communication tactics are typically less

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3 formal and can be highly interpersonal, as internal activists interact with their colleagues as
4 part of their day-to-day work (Wickert and De Bakker, 2018). Internal activists can also be
5 intentionally subtle in their communication tactics and work in ways that avoid conflict, as they
6 are seeking change in their own organizations where they are dependent on their employment
7 (Briscoe and Gupta, 2016). However, compared with external activists, internal activists have
8 generally more direct means to influence the target company, which is why external activists
9 can also seek to turn their role semi-internal by buying shares and filing shareholder
10 resolutions, thereby engaging in a form of shareholder activism (Briscoe and Gupta, 2016; den
11 Hond and de Bakker, 2007; see also Rehbein *et al.*, 2004).

23 24 25 *Inside-out: Activism as an organizational practice*

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27 While activism as an external and an internal force has already resulted in established fields of
28 research in and around organizations (Briscoe and Gupta, 2016), the recent surge of CEO,
29 brand and corporate activism constitutes yet another type that has started to attract the interest
30 of management and CSR scholars. These new phenomena are about public stances on divisive
31 socio-political issues, such as racism, sexual minority rights, and climate change, made directly
32 by business actors such as top executives, brands, or entire organizations (Chatterji and Toffel,
33 2019; Hambrick and Wowak, 2021; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Korschun *et al.*, 2019). Recent examples
34 include company stances made to support the Black Lives Matter movement (Bhagwat *et al.*,
35 2020), and corporate advertising campaigns to protest against discriminating immigration
36 policies (Gulbrandsen *et al.*, 2020). The fundamental change invested in these activities comes
37 in the form of first-hand involvement on the part of companies or their top management to push
38 for societal change, rather than activism targeting a focal company. Hence, the pressure exerted
39 is ‘inside-out’ as business actors call upon politicians, other companies, citizens, or the society
40 at large to act, and adopt communication strategies typically used by social movements and
41 pressure groups, as they take public stances and argue for the need to take action.
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3 When business actors engage in direct activism, their actions are typically greeted
4 with two-fold reactions, both public criticism and support by different stakeholder groups
5 (Dodd and Supa, 2014; Kim *et al.*, 2020). As an example, Nike's recent campaign with Colin
6 Kaepernick, the NFL player who protested against racism and police violence by kneeling
7 during the national anthem, created simultaneous boycott and buycott appeals (Hoffman *et al.*,
8 2020). Hence, companies' involvement in activism has been argued to knowingly divide and
9 antagonize stakeholders, instead of seeking support as broadly as possible across different
10 groups (Bhagwat *et al.*, 2020; Hoffman *et al.*, 2020; Hydock *et al.*, 2020; Korschun *et al.*,
11 2019). Some early insights have suggested that the success of socio-political stances by
12 business actors may depend on value-alignment: stances are more authentic when there are
13 company values that correspond with the stance (e.g., Korschun *et al.*, 2019), and if the
14 statement aligns with the values of certain crucial stakeholders such as employees and
15 consumers (Hambrick and Wowak, 2021). Value-alignment is also something to consider in
16 communication strategies, as activist stances are typically followed by public inquiries into the
17 motivations and possible intended outcomes of the stances, which affect the authenticity
18 assessments made by groups such as consumers (e.g., Vredenburg, 2020).
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--- Insert Table 1 about here ---

Opportunities for social activism in transformative service research: A research agenda

48 Contemporary transformative service research has highlighted several major research themes
49 that are at the heart of social change and well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013; 2015; Oström *et*
50 *al.*, 2014). In this section, we focus on five such themes, including employee well-being,
51 vulnerable consumers, value co-creation, sustainability, and service systems, and highlight how
52 social activism research could help to advance them. While the selected themes are by no means
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3 exhaustive, they cover a broad spectrum of key interactions between micro- and macro-level
4 service entities, including individuals, collectives, and ecosystems that have the potential to
5 influence social change and well-being (Anderson *et al.*, 2013). This offers a powerful
6 illustration of the rich scope, wide range, and far-reaching implications that social activism
7 research can offer to transformative service research and various service actors in service
8 (eco)systems.
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10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 *Employee well-being*

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20 The well-being and working conditions of employees in rapidly changing and turbulent
21 markets has been one of the cornerstones of transformative service research, but most of the
22 service research in this area has focused on the healthcare sector (Edgar *et al.*, 2017). Given
23 that employee well-being is also a well-established theme within social activism research,
24 combining these two areas could highlight interesting research opportunities.
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31 For example, research on external activism could help to understand how actors such
32 as NGOs and social movements put pressure on service providers regarding issues such as
33 questionable or poor working conditions for employees. This could include examinations of
34 how service providers are targeted by external activists, the tactics that external activists use to
35 shine a light on shortcomings in employee well-being, and the different implications of service
36 providers' response strategies to such outside-in pressure.
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45 Research on internal activism could help to adopt the lens and understand the
46 experiences of the service employees themselves and bring a more nuanced understanding to
47 how employees can transform service providers or entire service systems to better meet their
48 needs and align with their values. This could include inquiries into the tactics and strategies
49 that employees use to push for change inside their organization, comparisons of collaborative
50 and confrontational tactics in terms of actor experiences (i.e., stress, adversity, resistance) and
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3 realized outcomes (i.e., magnitude, scope, and stability of change), or conditions and thresholds
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5 that shape the manifestations and success (or failure) of these tactics and strategies.
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8 Research on activism as organizational practice could help to explain agency by top
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10 executives or brands/organizations to push for societal awareness of issues related to employee
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12 well-being, such as diversity and inclusion, aiming to mobilize others beyond their own
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14 company. This could include questions such as how service providers shape public discussions
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16 and their institutional environments when they engage in public debate, or how positioning as
17
18 an inside-out activist shapes the service provider's own reputation and role in the eyes of
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20 important stakeholders such as customers and employees.
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23 24 *Vulnerable consumers*

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27 Vulnerable or disadvantaged consumers and communities have become an increasingly
28
29 important area in the transformative service research, ranging from issues such as poverty,
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31 employment and healthcare to modern slavery, refugees, and the elderly as well as youth at
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33 risk (c.f., Rosenbaum *et al.*, 2017). While previous research has emphasized inclusion and
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35 access to services for vulnerable individuals and groups (Fisk *et al.*, 2018), social activism
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37 research can shed light on the actions that disadvantaged groups or other actors advocating for
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39 them can take to reduce vulnerability and disparity.
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43 For example, research on external activism could help to understand how consumers
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45 and broader communities mobilize societal stakeholders and aim to influence service
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47 organizations with outside-in pressure. This could include research on how causes permeate,
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49 spread, and gain in importance under different conditions, or how service providers might find
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51 ways to work together with external activists to address critical issues related to vulnerable or
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53 disadvantaged consumers and communities.
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56 Research on internal activism could help to understand how different vulnerable
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58 groups, or employees serving them, seek ways to voice their concerns and build support for
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3 their causes. This could include inquiries into alternative communication channels and
4 engagement strategies that vulnerable groups use to seek publicity for their cause, potential
5 environmental variables that can shape the effectiveness of their messages, or how they may
6 aim to transform their own positions in the service encounters to gain more influence in the
7 processes in which they are involved.
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15 Research on activism as organizational practice could help to explain what kind of
16 marketing practices and strategies different organizations and/or brands use to decrease,
17 challenge, maintain, or exacerbate vulnerability in service systems (Cheung and McColl-
18 Kennedy, 2019). This could include examinations of the use and effectiveness of alternative
19 marketing campaigns, policy directives, or discursive practices to reduce vulnerability, or
20 potential dark side practices that organizational actors use (un)intentionally to “defend the
21 status quo, reduce accountability and delay action” for reducing or mitigating vulnerability
22 (Meehan and Pinnington, 2021, p. 77).
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33 *Sustainability*

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36 Sustainability and sustainable development continue to be one of the most significant topics in
37 the broader service research, with far-reaching societal and ecological implications (Ostrom *et*
38 *al.*, 2015; Field *et al.*, 2021). While transformative service research has emphasized sustainable
39 service design (Alkire *et al.*, 2020), research on social activism could help shed light on how
40 different stakeholders in service systems engage in sustainability efforts.
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48 For example, research on external activism could help to understand how different
49 consumer groups, social communities, and the broader society attach societal and political
50 connotations to purchasing behavior, or how they exert pressure by attempting to influence
51 production and delivery processes. This could include inquiries into the willingness to support
52 (or not support) service providers with different sustainability agendas and targets, and whether
53 sustainability endeavors might protect service organizations from external activist pressure.
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3 Research on internal activism could help to understand how employees engage in or
4 facilitate sustainability efforts inside organizations and along supply chains. This could include
5 research on grassroots organizing within organizations, including efforts to seek support and
6 mobilize resources both upward and downward in organizations, by both individuals and larger
7 groups of employees, and the individual, group, and organizational level factors that drive or
8 hinder employees' willingness to join and participate in these activities.
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12 Research on activism as organizational practice could help to understand how service
13 providers seek to position themselves in service markets with their sustainability endeavors,
14 and how they engage in institutional and/or transformative work to push sustainability beyond
15 their own organization. This could include examinations of how organizations use activism to
16 renew industry standards or practices, and shape sociocultural expectations for firm and
17 industry level value propositions (Keränen, 2017; Ranta *et al.*, 2020; Närvänen *et al.*, 2022).
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20 21 22 *Service systems and societal change*

23 Societal change in broader service (eco)systems is the ultimate goal of both transformative
24 service research and social activism, and as the different types of pressure (outside-in, inside-
25 in, inside-out) demonstrate, different actors can take action—and combine forces for a shared
26 cause. In practice, service providers may join forces with employees, customers, partners, or
27 competitors to introduce impactful changes not only in their own company, but in entire service
28 systems. As such, activism research can add nuance to understanding companies' attempts to
29 design, implement, and communicate new initiatives to drive social change, and co-create
30 positive social impacts with different stakeholders (Tura *et al.*, 2019; Vink *et al.*, 2021).
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32 For example, research on external activism could help to understand how service
33 providers respond to broad societal movements that permeate markets, both reactively and
34 proactively. This could include discursive examinations of societal debate on issues such as
35 social justice and climate change, and evolving expectations of service providers therein, or
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3 inquiries into collaborations and partnerships, especially how cross-sector partnerships
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5 between business, civil society and the public sector might serve as a strong tool for achieving
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7 transformative goals.
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10 Research on internal activism could help to understand the interconnectedness of
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12 different groups and actors, when perceived from a broad societal perspective. Employees are
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14 also citizens, customers, and sometimes co-owners of the company, which means that they are
15
16 in a key position to direct any external pressure inwards. Activism research can help address
17
18 questions such as how employees navigate their organizational and societal roles, or creatively
19
20 find ways to combine different roles, or what are the circumstances under which internal
21
22 activism is able to create broader change in the service system beyond the target organization.
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26 Research on activism as organizational practice could help to understand how, in the
27
28 broadest sense, service providers shape their markets, industries, and institutional
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30 environments. This could include questions such as how service providers become
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32 transformative leaders in their service systems, initiate radical change processes towards
33
34 systemic change (cf., Delmas, Lyon, and Maxwell, 2019), and convince and engage with other
35
36 ecosystem actors to join their cause (Fehrer *et al.*, 2020), or how different social, political, or
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38 regulatory factors drive or hinder organizational change in different service systems
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40 (Kokshagina and Keränen, 2021).
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47 *Value co-creation*

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49 Value co-creation has long been a cornerstone of service research, informing how and why
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51 service stakeholders interact with each other to create beneficial outcomes (Oström *et al.*, 2015;
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53 Zeithaml *et al.*, 2020). While the previous transformative service research has focused largely
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55 on value co-creation and positive service experiences (Anderson *et al.*, 2015), social activism
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57 research can extend this in terms of the conflict and contestation created by activist pressure,
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3 and how it manifests in activities that may or even seek to destroy value in some service
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5 encounters.
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8 For example, research on external activism could help to understand how actors such
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10 as NGOs and social movements seek to influence service providers, either individually or
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12 collectively, sometimes with a specific goal to disrupt the service process. This could include
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14 examinations of the use of different tactics, including confrontational tactics such as boycott
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16 and protest, or how different tactics might influence different phases of the service process and
17
18 different actors.
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22 Research on internal activism could help to understand how employees themselves
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24 perceive their role in value co-creation, and what they perceive and accept as value. This could
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26 include research on both subtle and overt tactics that employees can use to transform or
27
28 challenge existing value co-creation processes, how value alignments or misalignments may
29
30 affect how employees engage in value co-creation (c.f., McGraw *et al.*, 2019), or how
31
32 employees work together to maintain or transform value co-creation either across their own
33
34 organization or across the service system.
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38 Research on activism as organizational practice could help to understand how service
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40 providers create simultaneously positive and negative experiences and engagement, as their
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42 public stances are known to provoke divisive responses of support and opposition from focal
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44 groups such as customers. This could include research on how different brands can join forces
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46 to push for societal awareness, or how service-provider activism is assessed by different groups
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48 and under different organizational, environmental, or political conditions, how those
49
50 assessments affect service encounters, and how to choose strategies when the same activity is
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52 perceived as value-adding by some and value-destructive by others (Makkonen and Olkkonen,
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54 2017). Table 2 summarizes the key opportunities that social activism research can offer
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56 transformative service research.
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10 **Conclusions, implications, and future research avenues**

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13 Several service scholars have highlighted the need for more inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary
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15 research approaches as a key priority to resolve critical well-being problems in the
16
17 contemporary service society (Field *et al.*, 2021; Oström *et al.*, 2021). This article responds to
18
19 these calls by integrating two previously separate, but well-aligned disciplines, social activism
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21 and transformative service research, and highlighting fruitful research opportunities to drive
22
23 social change and positive transformation in service (eco)systems. This complements recent
24
25 studies that have considered how disciplines like service design, social entrepreneurship, and
26
27 social marketing can be linked with transformative service research to “create greater
28
29 synergetic effects to advance well-being and drive social impact” (Alkire *et al.*, 2020, p. 24;
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31 Russell-Bennett *et al.*, 2020).
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36 Specifically, this paper offers transformative service scholars a research agenda that
37
38 highlights new pathways to seek social change and enhanced well-being in modern
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40 multistakeholder service (eco)systems, and concrete research questions that can inform future
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42 scholarship at the intersection of social activism and transformative service research. For
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44 managers, practitioners and policy makers, this paper offers novel insights on how social
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46 activism can drive (or hinder) companies’ attempts to design, implement, and communicate
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48 new initiatives to drive social change, and co-create positive social impacts with different
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50 stakeholders, using a variety of communication strategies.
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54 While this paper has considered the potential of social activism in transformative
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56 service research, future studies could expand on this, and consider how other disciplines or
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58 approaches could enrich and advance the current understanding of transformative service
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3 research. For example, systematic and integrative literature, theoretical, or methodological
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5 reviews could highlight the suitability of a wide range of different approaches to transformative
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7 service research. Alternatively, various forms of field research, ranging from extensive case
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9 studies and ethnographic research designs (Keränen and Prior, 2020) to fuzzy-set qualitative
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11 comparative analyses and experiments (Salonen *et al.*, 2021) could be used to explore some of
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13 the highlighted research questions, and develop better understanding on the influence of social
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15 activism in transformative service research. Given the growing importance of transformative
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17 service research in complex service ecosystems (Field *et al.*, 2021), we hope this paper will
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19 encourage and offer new avenues for scholarly research in this area.
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Table 1: Three forms of social activism: External, internal, and organizational practice

	External activism	Internal activism	Activism as organizational practice
Example definitions	<p>“activism towards the resolution of specific issues involving the social responsibilities of corporations” (Doh and Guay, 2006, p. 48)</p> <p>“Activist groups step forward to articulate societal preferences about the level and nature of corporate social change activities, and they challenge firms to comply with these preferences.” (den Hond and de Bakker, 2007, p. 917)</p>	<p>“Internal activists believe in and identify with corporate responsibility and may mobilize others in an endeavor to promote different ways of thinking about and doing business.” (Girschik, 2020, p. 35)</p> <p>“Shareholder activists [submit] social-policy resolutions with the intent of altering the social behavior of poor corporate performers.” (Rehbein <i>et al.</i>, 2004, p. 260)</p>	<p>“corporate leaders speaking out on social and environmental policy issues not directly related to their company’s core business” (Chatterji and Toffel, 2019, p. 159)</p> <p>“brands seeking to stand out in a fragmented marketplace by taking public stances on social and political issues.” (Vredenburg <i>et al.</i>, 2020, p. 444)</p>
Type of pressure	Outside-in	Inside-in	Inside-out
Actors of activism	NGOs Social movements Consumers Citizens	Employees Shareholders (semi-internal)	Top executives Brands Organizations
Targets of activism	Business organizations	Own company	Societal practices and norms Politicians Other companies
Communication strategies	Public and aimed to attract interest in the media Confrontational toward target company	Internal and aimed to attract interest on different levels of the company Interpersonal and collaborative	Public and aimed to attract interest in the media Deliberately divisive toward stakeholders
Examples of tactics	Advocacy campaigns Legal appeals Boycotts Public protests Boycotts Consultation	Internal advocacy Development projects Public protests	Public statements Advocacy campaigns Legal appeals Boycotts Public protest
Illustrative examples	<p>NGOs pushing for transparency on the use of conflict minerals in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Reinecke and Ansari, 2016)</p> <p>The Canadian seafood boycott to end the seal hunt (Braunsberger and Buckler, 2009)</p> <p>The partnership between Earthwatch and Rio Tinto to improve environmental responsibilities in mining (Seitanidi and Crane, 2008)</p>	<p>Employees at Novo Nordisk driving increasing responsibilities in addressing societal problems (Girschik, 2020)</p> <p>Shareholders filing social-policy shareholder resolutions to pressure companies into changing their internal policies and ultimately their social impact (Rehbein <i>et al.</i>, 2004)</p>	<p>Prominent CEOs publicly defending the law to protect underaged immigrants (“Dreamers”) (Branicki <i>et al.</i>, 2021)</p> <p>Companies launching anti-Trump advertising campaigns (Gulbrandsen <i>et al.</i>, 2020)</p> <p>Nike’s campaign featuring Colin Kaepernick who became a controversial figure after starting the movement to kneel during the American national anthem (Hoffman <i>et al.</i>, 2020)</p>

Table 2. Potential research questions to guide social activism research in major transformative service research areas

	Employee well-being	Vulnerable consumers	Sustainability	Service systems and societal change	Value co-creation
External activism	<p>How do actors such as NGOs and social movements pressure service providers on issues such as questionable or poor working conditions for employees?</p> <p>How can service providers respond to external activism?</p> <p>What are the implications of different response strategies on employee well-being?</p>	<p>How do consumers and broader communities mobilize societal stakeholders, and aim to influence service organizations with outside-in pressure?</p> <p>How can service-providers work together with external activists to address critical issues related to vulnerable consumers?</p>	<p>How do different consumer groups, social communities, and the broader society attach societal and political connotations to purchasing behavior, or exert pressure to influence production and delivery processes?</p> <p>How does external activism affect the willingness to support service providers with different sustainability agendas?</p>	<p>How do service providers respond to broad societal movements that permeate markets, both reactively and proactively?</p> <p>How do different actors in service systems work together to push for transformative goals?</p>	<p>How do actors such as NGOs and social movements seek to influence service providers with the aim to disrupt the service process?</p> <p>What are the tactics in use in external activism and how do different tactics influence different phases of value co-creation in the service process?</p>
Internal activism	<p>How can employees transform service providers or entire service systems to better meet their needs and align with their values?</p> <p>What are the implications of different strategies used by internal activists?</p>	<p>How do vulnerable groups, or employees serving them, seek ways to voice their concerns and build support for their causes?</p> <p>What kind of internal communication and collaboration strategies are successful and why?</p>	<p>How do employees engage in or facilitate sustainability efforts inside organizations and along supply chains?</p> <p>What are the individual, group, and organizational level factors that drive or hinder internal activism?</p>	<p>How do employees navigate their organizational and societal roles, and how can they creatively find ways to combine different roles?</p> <p>How and under what circumstances does internal activism create broader change in the service system beyond the target organization?</p>	<p>How do employees perceive their role in value co-creation, and what do they perceive and accept as value?</p> <p>How is employees' engagement in the value co-creation process affected by their participation in internal activism?</p> <p>How can employees work together across the organization or the service system to maintain or transform value co-creation?</p>

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<p>Activism as organizational practice</p>	<p>How and why do executives or brands/organizations push for societal awareness of issues related to employee well-being?</p> <p>How does activism done by service providers influence employee well-being either on an organizational level or across the service system?</p>	<p>What kind of marketing practices and strategies do different organizations and/or brands employ to reduce, challenge, maintain, or exacerbate vulnerability in service systems?</p> <p>What kind of marketing practices and strategies are successful and why?</p>	<p>How do service providers seek to position themselves in service markets with their sustainability endeavors?</p> <p>How do service providers engage in institutional and/or transformative work to push sustainability beyond their own organization?</p>	<p>How, in the broadest sense, do service providers shape their markets, industries, and institutional environments?</p> <p>How do different social, political, or regulatory factors drive or hinder change in service systems?</p>	<p>How do service providers create simultaneously positive and negative experiences and engagement, as their public stances are known to provoke divisive responses of support and opposition from focal groups such as customers?</p> <p>How does activism by service providers affect service encounters in terms of value added and/or value destroyed?</p>
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