
The intersections of Information Activism and Memory Activism: Towards an Action- Oriented Research Agenda



Allan A. Martell, PhD

Assistant Professor

Department of Information and Library Science

Indiana University Bloomington

[*allmarte@iu.edu*](mailto:allmarte@iu.edu)

Structure

- **Part 1. Information and social memory**
 - Information, knowledge, and social memory
 - Social Memories of Violence
 - Social Memory in Information Science
- **Part 2. Systematic Literature Review: Information Activism and Memory Activism**
 - Activism: Enabling Factors & Connections to Information and Memory
 - RQ: What are the overlaps between information activism and memory activism?
 - Information Activism
 - Memory Activism
 - Overlaps
- **Part 3. Towards a Research Agenda**



Part 1

Information & Social Memory

Information, knowledge, social memory

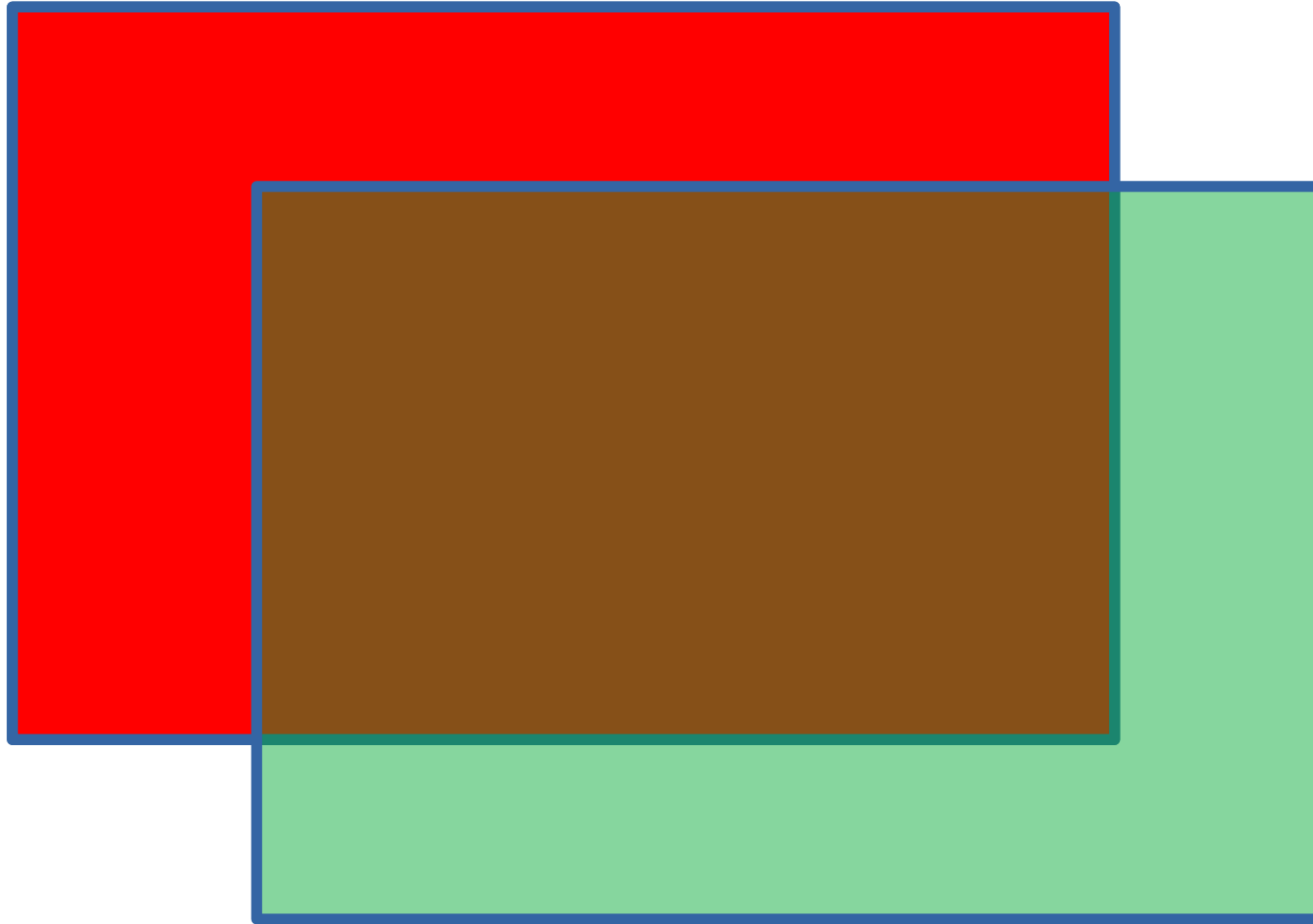
- **Information.** “Collected, organized, and/or structured data, providing context and meaning; meaning given by humans to collected data with a presumption of truth; answers questions that begin with who, what, where, when, and how many,” (Joudrey, 2025, p. 5-6)
- **Knowledge.** “What exists in the mind of someone who has studied a topic; know-how; learned information transmitted through education or experience.” (Joudrey, 2025, p. 5-6)
- **Social memory** is a type of knowledge that draws from recollections of past experiences, that is driven by present concerns, and that enables individuals to make decisions aligned with their desired future (Gutman, Sodaro, et al., 2010; Halbwachs, 1992).

Social Memories of Violence

- **Focus.** Social memories of violence
- **Example.** The Holocaust
- **Implication.** We all hold deeply held thoughts and feelings about past events that we have not directly experienced but learned about from family, school, the media, and other sources. These are also memories (Landsberg 2004).

Memory in Information Science

- **Archival Studies.** Example: Shoah Foundation
- **Museum studies.** Example: National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington D.C.
- **Social computing.** Designing postcolonial memories in Namibia



Part 2

Systematic Literature Review

Activism (Courpasson & Vallas 2016)

- Activism is the organized and purposeful practice of resisting injustices and working toward better social, political, and economic conditions.
- It manifests as a set of individual and collective actions through which people challenge systems of power, express dissatisfaction, and work toward social, political, or environmental change.
- It appears in many forms, from everyday small acts of resistance to large public protests, online movements, and community-based initiatives.
- It is fluid and context-dependent.

Enabling Factors

- Activism is the organized and purposeful practice of resisting injustices and working toward better social, political, and economic conditions.
- It manifests as a set of individual and collective actions through which people challenge systems of power, express dissatisfaction, and work toward social, political, or environmental change.
- It appears in many forms, from everyday small acts of resistance to large public protests, online movements, and community-based initiatives.
- It is fluid and context-dependent.

Connections to Information & Memory

- Information and social memory are interconnected in activist work.
- **Information.** When information infrastructures are embedded within activists' social relationships, values, spaces, and organizational practices, these infrastructures enhance the effectiveness of activist efforts (Khondker 2011, Butter & Knight 2020).
- **Memory.** Memories of past acts of dissent give present movements inspiration and inform their collective identity.

RQ

What are the overlaps between information activism and memory activism?

Systematic Literature Review

- **Year of publication:** 2000-2025
- **Search terms:** “information activism”, “archival activism”
- **Databases:** LISTA, LISA, Web of Science, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Wiley Online Library, SAGE Journals, ACM, IEEE
- **1st Screening.** 136 articles
- **2nd Screening.** 86 articles (36 – information activism; 50 – memory activism)
- **Deductive coding:** Year, Author(s), Database, Venue (e.g. preceeding, conference), Fields, Title, RQ, Argument, Methodology, Connection to Our RQ
- **Analysis:** concept maps, memos, outlines

Information Activism

- **Definition:** The deliberate use of information, media, and communication technology to promote social justice, challenge power systems, and empower marginalized communities (Mckinney 2022).
- **Goals:** social justice, empowering marginalized groups, access to trust-worthy information, challenging dominant narratives, building alternative knowledge systems
- **Strategies:** circulating information, promoting information literacy, building digital communities, documenting with community participation, opening public data.
- **Affordances:** increasing information access, rapid mobilization, empowerment through education, creating digital archives, constructing alternative narratives.
- **Challenges:** burnout, co-optation

Memory Activism

- **Definition:** Intentional efforts to shape public memory in ways that acknowledge historical injustices, create new narratives that resist forgetting, and promote victims' redress (Gutman et al. 2010). Remembering is a political act that individuals and groups employ to contest dominant histories and fight for change (Strauss 2015; Sackett 2024).
- **Goals:** structural change by educating the public, acknowledging silence voices, preserving hidden histories, healing community trauma, increasing visibility of marginalized groups, challenging official narratives, promoting social reconciliation, and fostering empathy for victims.
- **Strategies:** Public commemorations; erecting memorials, reframing pain through oral histories and other forms of storytelling, identifying human remains through forensic searches, pursuing academic work, curating museum exhibitions, producing artwork.
- **Affordances:** Overcoming silencing, mindfully approaching forgetting (not everything ought be remembered), preserving memories that may otherwise be lost, promoting public critical engagement with the past.
- **Challenges:** burnout, misuse or simplification of memories, retraumatizing individuals and communities.

Overlaps

- **Theoretical frameworks.** Critical theory (Novak 2013; Cuevas-Cervero et al. 2023), feminist epistemology (Elise & Khirsten 2023; Brown 2020; Hettiarachchi 2024), and information ethics (Mars 2017; Weber 2024).
- **Similar dissemination methods** like media (McKinney 2022; May 2023), archives (Cifor & Rawson 2023; Evans et al. 2015), and digital platforms (Max 2016; Bosch 2024).
- **Similar education strategies.** Documenting violence (Doğan & D'Ignazio 2025), Archiving (Chidgey 2024; Novak 2013), and Storytelling (Black, Kennedy, & Kent 2024)
- **They differ in focus and scope.** Information activism is not always memory-oriented. It includes a wider range of activities, such as raising awareness about current issues (May 2025), promoting access to information (Gaffney 2012, Nhedzi & Azionya 2025), and challenging censorship (Yuan 2017).

Cuban Missile Crisis



Cuban poems published in November 19th, 1968 edition of The Spectator

Demonstration for and against Cuban blockade decision made by President Kennedy.



Part 3 Towards a Research Agenda

Insight

- Memory activism seems to operate as a sub-type of information activism centered on promoting critical information literacy about past atrocities with the aim of advocating victims' redress and transformative change in the present.
- Studies at the intersection of memory and information activism should attend to information flows about the collective past as expressions of social memory.
- Example: Martell & Goryl's (2024) study of memories of January 6 on Twitter.
 - How is the event remembered one year after the assault on the capitol?
 - Who is responsible?
 - How to prevent future incidents?

Future Work

- **Qualitative.** Characterization of information flows triangulating multiple information sources, such as interviews, archival records, and participant observation.
- **Computational.** Social Network Analysis (SNA) focusing on past events informs public sentiment and behavior in the present, and how those reverberate as time passes.

Case Study

- **Background.**

- The University Archives at IU contain evidence of student movements dating back to the 1960s.
- Ample work has demonstrated the link between archives and memory, but the impact of information flows on memory is still poorly understood.

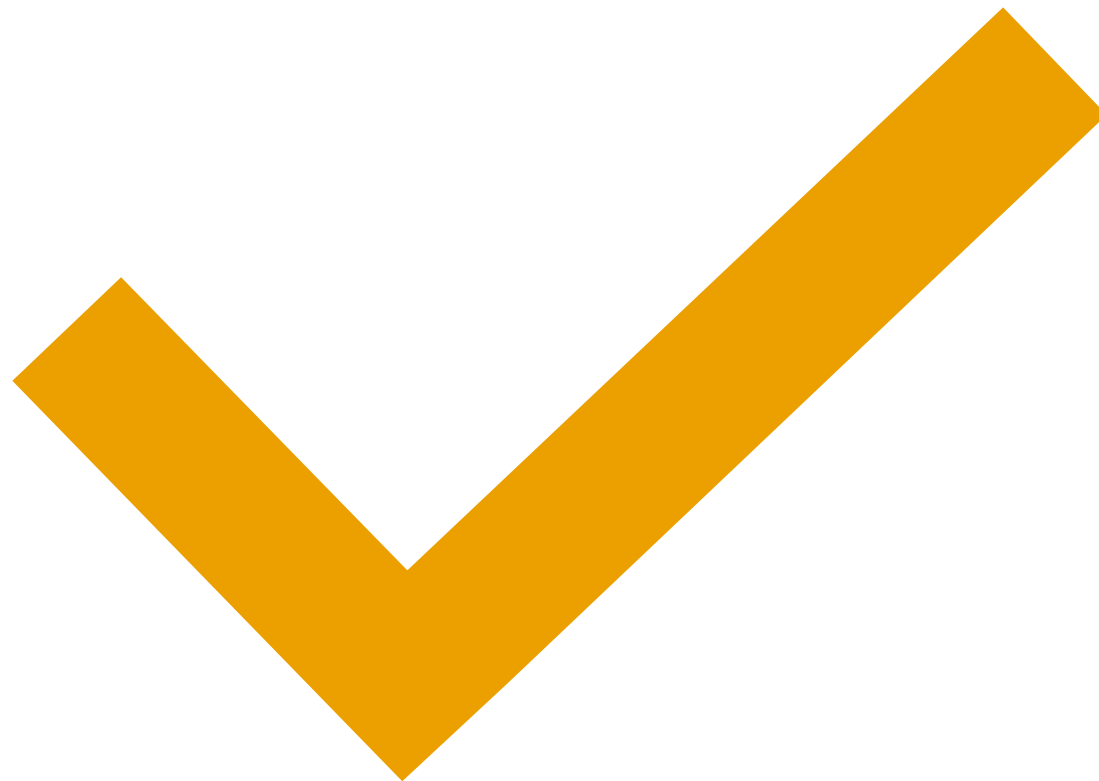
- **RQ**

- How does information flow within and without student movements shape information?
- How do student activists remember past movements?
- How do information flows shape student activists' memories?

- **Method**

- Primary source analysis
- Interviews

Summary



The intersections of Information Activism and Memory Activism

Social memory is a type of knowledge that draws from recollections of past experiences, that is driven by present concerns, and that enables individuals to make decisions aligned with their desired future (Gutman, Sodaro, et al., 2010; Halbwachs, 1992). Example: The Holocaust

RQ. What are the overlaps between information activism and memory activism?

Method

- Systematic literature review
- N = 86 articles (36 – information activism, 50 – memory activism)

Conclusion. We suggest considering memory activism as a sub-type of information activism centered on promoting critical information literacy about past atrocities with the aim of advocating victims' redress and transformative change in the present.

Future Work

- Qualitative and Computational Research focused on the intersection of memory and information activism must investigate how information flows about the collective past mediate expressions of social memory.
- We plan to study similar questions drawing from the case study of student movements at Indiana University.