

XVIII SOCIAL MEDIA & ACTIVISM

As mentioned, some argue that youth activism today is at its lowest points. They emphasize movements such as those in the USA, for example Black Panthers who fought for the rights of black people and oppressed people in America, or student movements and anti-war movement during the Vietnam war. In the 1970s, it was punk movement that had similar role - punkers wanted social change, and they established their own music, fashion and lifestyle in opposition to the dominant culture.

Countless individuals have written about the student movement of the 1960s. Despite the topical and stylistic differences between the works, what cannot be disputed is that each author credits the student movement as having played a large role in helping to facilitate drastic changes within society. Aside from their obvious link to the anti - Vietnam war movement, the students were also heavily involved in social justice for the civil rights movement, the women's liberation movement and gay rights, as well as environmental issues and freedom of speech, among other things.

Today, as some say, youth are self-centered, narcissistic and so on, and they take no part in civic participation.

Others however posit that countless youth are civically engaged and involved in movements outside of traditional political groups such as trade unions and political parties. If only small percentage of young people are activists, maybe we are underestimating the importance of their practices and the ways they use technology. Kassimir concludes that *"our understanding of contemporary youth activism - local and global, national and transnational - lags woefully behind the political practices of young people... Many young people have found their voices and are speaking up for change"*.

Social Media and Youth Activism

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It also stands to reason that since youth spend countless hours on the social media, these too should be primary tools for facilitating civic participation and activism. So, how are young people using these tools for activism?

Another scholar recently explored *Facebook* and *Twitter* as resources for youth activism. And as he claims, the youth of today are challenging tradition and engaging in activist practices that either go unnoticed or are disregarded as non-activism when applying the old terms: technological advancement has necessitated a new way of understanding activism among young people. The nowadays world is being transformed by young people, "*but critically and crucially through means and methods that are unfamiliar to adults*".

18.1. Can the Internet bring social change?

Researchers remain polarized by the ongoing discussions about the potential of the Internet in creating social change. Some remain sceptics who do not believe in the possibility of the Internet in creating social change, but there are a growing number of studies that oppose these claims. Their results suggest that the potential of current technologies and specifically, social media, are being effectively used by young activists who are forming new modes of activism. The results clearly suggest that although Facebook's potential to connect young activists is enormous, sustaining a young person's interest in a group and in a cause is a bit more challenging. "Tweets", or messages sent, and "re-tweets", re-sending messages made by other posters, far outnumber posts made on Facebook pages. Moreover, unlike the Facebook groups, individual members of Twitter tend to be more diverse in the number of issues they address. These findings reveal that many young people are currently involved in activism.

However, obstacles such as the prevalent mythology that positions youth as disengaged quickly need to be disproven. Young people are definitively taking advantage of social media to facilitate youth activism, but the effectiveness of these actions is not as explicit.

18.2. Social Networks & Social Change: *The Case of the Arab Spring*

The Arab Spring was a wave of demonstrations and protests that, from 2010 onwards, affected the Middle Eastern countries and brought downfall to regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, and affected a number of others, including Jordan, Syria, Morocco etc.

According to several analysts, youth activism on social networks played a major role in these events. Namely, as public media were constantly censoring information and blocking every attempt of organizing protests,

Jelena Spremo, one of the contributors to the *TYM*, wrote about the role of social media during the *Arab Spring*.

Check her article out [here](#).

youth needed to join this movement by using other different approaches. In some countries, such as Tunisia and

Egypt, they used social media for organizing demonstrations and spreading awareness. Also, they were sharing information, promoting strikes and other rebellions. You Tube, Facebook and Twitter had the main role. Thousands of people were informing each other about the protest by Facebook pages and Twitter posts. And this approach attracted tens of thousands of followers that participated in the platform for political action.

There were also situations in which government blocked access to websites and/or Internet in the entire country. In **Tunisia** government blocked some websites through which protests were coordinated. In **Egypt**, government at first blocked only Facebook and Twitter, but then the whole Internet suffered a blackout in an attempt to stop the protests, and this lasted for 5 days. Eventually, this encouraged the protests even more.

Spremo concludes: "*Activism through the social media proved to be arguably one of the best new ways for gaining freedom of speech, democracy, human rights etc. But on the other hand, there are potentially very important questions about the usage of the social media as a long-term solution. Will clicks, shares and likes be enough for changing the world or there is need for more involvement with our political reality? In addition, this kind of approach is very sensitive and we got familiar with that in cases in Egypt and Tunisia. Time will give the answers, but for now, we can't neglect its power.*"

So, to conclude, why is Youth Activism so important?

In the *Preface* to the *Youth Activism Encyclopaedia*, editors respond to this question as follows: "*If democratic societies are to survive and flourish and if authoritarian governments are to become more democratic, they need citizens who are informed and concerned and who take action when necessary to improve the status quo.*"

Finally, many young people today, especially in the Balkans, are too often ready to say - yes, this is all great, but it is all for nothing as well, because young people cannot influence or change anything. Well, the shortest answer for them would be to refer to one Youth Activist's toolkit that uses a motto the following words of a famous female anthropologist *Margaret Mead*: "*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*" In other words, it was always that a few dedicated people inspired many and pushed for a change.