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SOCIAL MEDIA AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

BACHELOR'S THESIS

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Abstract

Ever since social movement organisers started using the internet as a tool, the relationship between the two has been highly debated. As social media developed, social movements found their place on platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook or YouTube. Still, it remains unclear just how social media affects the process of creating, organising and mobilising a social movement. The purpose of this paper is to review the history of social movements on social media and research the ever-growing relationship between social movements and social media.

Keywords: social media, social movements, protests, hashtag, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, mobilisation

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Introduction

Modern social movements, as in many other aspects of today's world, have been under the influence of the ongoing development of technologies. The many advancements made in the field of communication technology and the media in the last decade paved the way for building social movements, spreading messages, accumulating members and tackling societal issues in the virtual space. The Internet makes for an ideal platform for forming social movements, as it provides an unlimited amount of virtual space, available to a vast number of people, any time, anywhere. Not only did the technological revolution provide a massive platform for mobilization, it also completely changed how we, as a public, view, consider and react to social issues and questions - every problem, from even the smallest parts of the world, can become relevant on a global level in a matter of minutes. Traditional media has long-established the roles of actors in the process of information exchange they deal with. Journalists, editors, company owners are on one side - collecting, organizing, deciding what information goes public and which stays. On the other side is the public, consumers of every piece of news the media decides to release. This kind of dynamic puts the power in the hands of the media, which can control, manipulate and distort information in their favour, which can leave the public vulnerable, with no other choice than to rely on the big corporations for the information they distribute. Social media completely reshaped the media - public relations in ways that were unimaginable before the advancements of technology. In the last twenty years, social media has seen the rise of citizen journalists - ordinary people whose profession is not journalism, but who make efforts to capture, publish and distribute information to fellow members of the public, by using mobile technology. Citizen journalists have a bigger role than ever before, considering that operating on the internet excludes the large number of obstacles and limitations that professional journalists face when working in the traditional sector of the media. People's unity on social media proved to be very powerful: from effecting presidential elections in different countries across the world, raising awareness and providing relief in times of crisis, to shifting entire industries with activism, social media is a tool that can be very efficient when people are seeking change in the world. While social media can be revolutionary, it can be problematic just the same. Social movements on social media are often treated like trends; they are not very long-lasting, they lack depth and members of the movements are not constant, nor does the amount members show a linear rise or decrease. With such a large number of prominent social movements on social media, activism often comes as a priority on all social platforms.

Social movements are no longer clustered in the corners of the internet, they are everywhere, from Facebook to Instagram and TikTok. This leads to a growing problem - performative activism. It is expected from everyone to have knowledge, an opinion, and a standpoint on all societal issues, no matter the education on the problem (or lack thereof). Staying silent on issues one is not interested in is no longer an option, as social media has created an atmosphere where everyone is supposed to be an activist, and the 'correct' stance on the problem is often the one the majority holds. This begs the question: is the vast space the internet offers really a good thing for social movements? Is the everlasting discussion on social problems on the internet actually making us desensitized to issues others face? With so many positives of social movements on the internet being emphasized, are the negative sides actually prevailing?

Formation of social movements on social media

A social movement is a term used to describe a large number of informally organised individuals who strive to make a change in society. Their efforts are usually directed toward solving social, political, economic or environmental issues of their community. Lorenz von Stein, a German sociologist, was the first to coin the term 'social movement', in his book Socialist and Communist Movements since the Third French Revolution, from 1848. He said it "conveyed the idea of a continuous, unitary process by which the whole working class gained self-consciousness and power" (Tilly, 2018). Social movements are, generally, initiated and led by people who were victims of a political system, the government, certain laws, etc. According to Andrews (2002) leaders of social movements are called 'key social movement actors'. The key actors stay active even when the movement is not in its active stage, keeping the movement afloat by interacting and spreading their message. As opposed to traditional social movements, social movements started on social media notably lack leaders; the responsibility of keeping the movement alive is dispersed among members, activists, and social media users, without an appointed leader(s). (Andrews, 2002)

> Social media, by its nature, promoted decentralisation at the expense of centralisation, and technical networks at the expense of the hierarchical nature of structures. It also favoured activists who have many followers on social media platforms in place of experts. (Obaid, 2020)

To exchange ideas, highlight and discuss relevant issues, people need a forum of some kind. Whether the individuals form a movement in a classroom, coffee shop or a city square, they need a place to form a group where members can connect and interact with one another about topics that they gathered for. In today's age, the physical locations of gatherings can easily be replaced with virtual ones. Social media, as a group of technologically advanced applications that allow both creation and exchange of user-generated content (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) make for an ideal setting in which social movements can prosper. Social media offers many perks which social movements can benefit from - from the unlimited space the Internet offers to the interactive potential it has, social movements have the opportunity to amass new members and spread their message further than it was ever imagined. But how does a social movement get its start on social media? Lopes (2014) claims that a successful social movement will require two basic

factors – organisation and resources (such as money, political opportunities and connections, time, and organisational skills).

Besides the logistical aspect of a social movement, there is one element at the core of every social movement - the common interest, the cause the members are fighting for. Barnett (2014) highlights injustice and inequality as the driving force for every social movement that seeks to take a stand against the power holders. When it comes to the formation of a social movement on social media, Lopes (2014) points out five key aspects - communication, organisation, mobilisation, validation, and scope enlargement. (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993). Communication is an important determining factor when it comes to building a social movement. Creating a message that will resonate with a large group of people and will be spread throughout social media is crucial; a good message needs to be direct, concise and memorable, for it is a tool for amassing members and spreading interest for the cause. Social media proved itself to be the fastest, most efficient platform for conveying and spreading any kind of message. No less important are the organisational skills of a social movement. In order for a social movement to be successful, it has to be very well organised and meticulously thought out. Forming and spreading a proper message, attracting members, and mobilising people is not easy - and requires a high level of organisation which is vital in making a movement successful. Organisation is also important when it comes to mobilising members; convincing people of a message is one thing, but encouraging them to act in the interest of the cause is no easy task. However, mobilisation is, perhaps, the most vital part of a social movement, as it is the time when members act on their beliefs and seek for their requirements to be met. Mobilising in the modern age does not exclusively refer to gathering in public areas, but also uniting efforts of the movement's members toward a goal by sending e-mails, posting or reposting messages on social media, virtually drawing the attention of politicians, power-holders, and people who have authority in different industries. One of the most important things for a social movement is to be validated; by its members, media, important figures, and power holders. When a social movement is accepted and approved by different actors in society, it has a much higher chance of achieving success. The one element that separates social media from every other platform a social movement can use, is the enlarged scope of reach. No other platform has the ability to reach so many people, from different backgrounds, in a matter of seconds. Social media, therefore, is the fastest way to spread a message, globalise a local issue, and make people interested in the aim of a cause.

Role of social media in social movements

German sociologist Jurgen Habermas defined the term public sphere as a sphere "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society." (1989) Social media, a group of relatively new platforms, completely transformed the traditional understanding of the public sphere. Now, more than ever before, it is possible for a large number of people to gather in a (virtual) public sphere and analyse and discuss societal issues. Shirky (2011) points to the fact that, even though they have gotten more complex in recent years, they have also become more participatory, and, thanks to social media, more people have the chance to join in the public discourse and partake in collective action. Dorothy Kidd recognized the important role social media plays in creating a space for a democratic, non-censored space for global communication. (2002) What that means is, that social media provides a type of communication that is least likely to be controlled by any kind of authority, government, or political system (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). The role of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) based social media can be narrowed down to 5 key elements: as resources, to support collective identity, as framing devices, as mobilisation tools and as spaces (Hara & Huang, 2011). In order for a social movement to function properly, it needs resources: funds, time, people - it needs investments.

Hara and Estrada consider that social media especially capitalises on "knowledge, interpersonal interactions, identity support, and the building of credibility and legitimacy." (2005) Social media offers a large platform for sharing information all across the world, but, even more, it offers a possibility of two-way communication between movement leaders and members, leaders amongst themselves, as well as members with one another. Instant communication is an aspect that separates social media as a platform for social movements from any that came before it. It helps build the identity of the movement, as well as connect all participants and build a strong identity for the movement.

One major resource every social movement needs is money, which is why many social movements found success on the internet – fund-raising has been made very simple on social media. Aside from the messages urging people to donate to the cause, some social media platforms have their own, distinct ways of fundraising. For example, Twitter uses hashtags to gather people around a certain cause, and while it does not have a direct, 'in-site' option for donating, it easily directs users to official websites where donating can be done. On the other hand, Instagram and Facebook have incorporated ways to donate to people,

organisations and social movements. There are also platforms dedicated exclusively to fundraising, such as the crowdfunding platform

GoFundMe. Social movements, just like any organisation or private person can open a profile on GoFundMe, and, after an account is verified, people can donate to the cause, both publicly and anonymously. Fundraising is helpful to a movement in more ways than one; it also helps build and sustain the collective identity of the group, as well as solidarity among members. To define it Wooley (2007) says that "collective identity refers to the shared definition of a group that derives from its members' common interests, experiences, and solidarities."

Social media, as a tool, can be very useful in building a collective identity, as well as the solidarity of a social movement as it offers unlimited virtual space in which members can exchange ideas, share interests, and build the identity of the movement.

> Not only is the formation of collective identity easier due to the Internet's ability to unite people with similar grievances in disparate geographical areas, but also the diffusion of the collective identity is faster and easier. (Park, 2003)

Another role of social media is to form 'collective action frames'. Benford and Snow defined collective action frames as "action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimise the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization." (2000). Furthermore, social movements use the process of strategic framing in order to be recognized and approved by the public, as well as "to define enemies, and to highlight the movement's own role in reaching its goals" (Guenther et al., 2020). Aside from the proper framing, in order for a social movement to be successful, it needs to mobilise its members - call them to action. Social media is, as previously stated, a powerful tool when it comes to communication, which is why it is so useful when a social movement needs to mobilise its members. Its vast reach, interactive potential, as well as ability to virtually gather people around a cause, makes social media a crucial tool for a social movement. It also provides limitless space across numerous platforms, for every movement to find a place for itself. Not only is space infinite, but it is also less regulated than any platform traditional media can offer. If a social movement wishes to spread its message over social media, it can do so with significantly fewer obstacles - in a globalised space with a diverse audience.

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First social movements on the Internet

The Zapatista movement

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation organised an uprising all throughout the Mexican state of Chiapas, taking over multiple towns with an army of 12,000 people.
The rebellion started on January 1, 1994, the very same day the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was instated. (Pollitt, 2010)

Zapatistas fought for democracy, the neglected rights of indigenous people, justice, peace, policy change, as well as environmental disasters which affected everyone, but the poor especially. (First Declaration from the Lancandon Jungle, 1993) The Mexican government accepted the ceasefire on the ninth day of battle, perhaps thanks to the numerous protests in support of the Zapatistas, as well as international media coverage the uprising had gotten. As the press was not allowed into the combat zones in Chiapas, the internet became the main source of information. (Martinez-Torres, 2001)

The newfound way of conveying information insured the international support Zapatistas received during, as well as after the warfare with the Mexican government. It was due to the images circling the internet that both the national and international media covered the uprising of the Zapatistas, as well as received the sympathy of the world for fighting for basic human rights against a powerful government. (Inclán, 2009)

Seattle WTO protests of 1999

While the Zapatista movement did not start online, but rather found its way to the internet in later stages, the World Trade Organisation (WTO) protestors took an alternative route. The protestors took to the internet to mobilize, organize, and plan the sequence of actions that would disrupt the conference on globalization and global trade negotiation that was supposed to be held on November 30 in Seattle (Anderson, 1998). In preparation for the event, the members of the anti-WTO movement created a number of websites that provided information on a series of actions dubbed 'N30', which was a reference to November 30, the first day of the conference. The websites served as calls to action but also had plans of action, vital information, options for members to interact, etc. By December 1, after the protesters swarmed the streets around the location of the conference, protests had turned violent, resulting in numerous arrests, some injuries during the clashes with the police, as well as millions of

dollars in property damage. (Casey-Sawicki, 2013) Nonetheless, protestors were victorious in the sense that they did not rely on traditional media to convey their message and accurately portray the events that transpired during the protests, rather they used the internet, for the first time ever, to broadcast the entire protest, in real-time, to an unlimited audience with unmeasurable reach.

Early usage of social media in social movements

Iranian protests of 2009

Following the presidential elections in 2009, Iran saw major unrest amongst its people. CNN (Bower et al., 2009) reported that the anti-government protests started after conservative candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took the victory in the elections, just hours after the polls closed. Ahmadinejad's opponent, former prime minister Mir Hossein Mousavi was seen as a favourite during the campaign period and was set to win the election, which is why he called his supporters to protest the results of the elections. This resulted in massive displays of frustration and dissatisfaction from the voters on the streets of Tehran, as well as in other locations all over Iran. (Afary et al.) In the days following the elections, the protests kept escalating; protestors were coming into conflict with the police and the number of arrests rose hourly (Siamdoust, 2009). Seeing that protests were not subsiding, and unrest kept growing among the Iranian people, the government took measures to silence its people quickly.

Nahid Siamdoust, reported that the government quickly thought of ways to control the input and output of news. (Siamdoust, 2009) They used various methods to either block or interfere with the proper function of mobile networks, the internet, and even television and radio broadcasts. With the suppression of most of the traditional media outlets, Iranians had no other choice but to turn to the internet, more specifically to social media, in order to report on what was happening on their streets, as well as to mobilize and organize the protests. (Carafano, 2009) In 2006, CNN launched a website called I-Report with the aim of including citizens all across the globe in contributing to the process of making news (2007). This citizen journalism-based website proved to be extremely useful to the people of Iran during the 2009 protests.

> From June 13 to June 17, iReport.com received nearly 1,600 citizen-produced reports from Iran- mostly photos along with some video content. Plus, the site has added over 3,000 new members over that period, more than double its normal rate. (Mediaweek, 2009)

The government tried everything to disrupt and block the flow of information in Iran, which meant that the people of Iran needed to persist, but also be creative in the ways of interacting and spreading information. Iranians found ways to avoid the restrictions imposed on them,

by using social applications that were not connected to certain websites. They also used proxy servers in order to get over the many obstacles the Iranian government had put into place (Carafano, 2009). Despite the government's attempts to isolate Iranians, Iran was not alone in its efforts to oppose, combat and resist their oppressive regime. For example, users on Twitter from all around the world organized an action to change the location to Tehran, Iran, as well as change the time zone to Iran's - all to make it seem that there are far more Twitter users in Iran than there actually were, which then made it difficult for the authorities to find and prosecute users that were 'illegaly' sharing information from the country and speaking unfavourably about the regime online. (Elson et al., 2012) Facebook also aided people in Iran by releasing a beta version of its application entirely in Persian, which helped in including even more members and, therefore, further improved the flow of information. (Shachtman, 2009) YouTube also eased its usually strict guidelines, so that even the graphic content can be uploaded and the true state of affairs could then be broadcast into mainstream media, which is how scenes from Tehran found their way to CNN. Along with the one on the streets, Iranians were also fighting a virtual war against their government. Not only that, but soon after their fight started online, they also had to combat millions of trolls, and purposefully planted misinformation, all while trying to spread awareness for their situation.

Arab Spring

A Tunisian produce vendor committed suicide by setting himself on fire in front of a government office. The events that preceded this tragedy would become a trigger for a series of protests, civil unrest, and rebellions that would spread out through the entirety of the Arab world, also known as the Arab Spring.

26-year-old Mohamed Bouazizi sold fruit and vegetables from his unlicensed cart, when a policewoman seized it, but also slapped Bouazizi and spat in his face. The frustration built up from years of mistreatment by the police, injustice and corrupt authorities - all of which lead Mohamed Bouzazi to take his life by setting himself on fire for the whole world to see. (Noueihed, 2011) This event seemed to have moved people, people stricken with poverty, most affected by corrupted governments and oppressive systems, and thus started the Arab spring. The movement took Middle Eastern countries by storm: protests in Syria, Yemen, Libya, civil unrest in Egypt and Bahrain, and rebellions in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Oman. (Ruthven, 2020) Once again, the world saw the power of a citizen journalist, as most of the information about the evolving situation in Arab countries

came from the citizens, rather than through usual, traditional means of broadcasting. People took out their phones and snapped pictures, captured videos and posted about the events directly, on their Facebook, Twitter or YouTube accounts.

> Social media served as an instrument of local and national mobilization, communication,
> and coordination; helped propagate international revolutionary contagion; and
> contributed to the enhancement of a pan-Arab consciousness which facilitated
> the contagion process. (Howard & Hussain, 2011)

Throughout all their efforts, citizens of Arab countries faced almost the same problem Iranians did in 2009: major counteraction from their respective governments. The government in Tunisia blocked certain websites, the ones they saw collective action forming on, while the Egyptian government took a more significant step - initially they blocked off access to Twitter and Facebook, but then ordered internet providers to shut down the internet entirely. (Stepanova, 2011)

The role of social media in the Arab Spring is very much debated in the literature, but its significance cannot be denied. Not only was it vital in spreading awareness of the crisis Arabs were facing, but it inspired movements that resulted in actual change. Governments and dictators were overthrown in Tunisia and Egypt, in Libya movements were started, and in Syria social media remains an important tool, seeing as foreign journalists are effectively prohibited from the country. (Gire, 2017)

Occupy movement

Inspired by the Arab Spring movements, Americans started a series of their own movements the very same year, protesting the ever-growing corporate greed, as well as obvious economic inequality that affected the entire United States.

The initial movement was called 'Ocuppy Wall Street' and it took place in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, or Zuccotti Park to be exact - which is symbolic considering that Zuccotti Park is located in the Financial District. (Cao, 2017)

The movement started when a magazine from Vancouver, called Adbusters, sent out an email to its entire list of subscribers that, among other things, directly called for action:

> On September 17, we want to see 20,000 people flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitc-
> hens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street for a few months. Once there, we shall inces-
> santly repeat one simple demand in a plurality of voices. (Komlik, 2022)

The e-mail went on to say that "It's time for DEMOCRACY NOT CORPORATOCRACY" (Komlik, 2022), but was not clear in its aims or offered a list of demands. Nonetheless, people listened and attended the September 17 protest. In the beginning, the movement was not getting any mainstream media attention, that is until pictures of conflict between protestors and the police went viral and the movement became hard to ignore. The official websites of the Occupy movement, as well as Facebook and Twitter, showed to be the most useful and efficient tools for spreading information. (Gamson & Sifry, 2013)

A Tumblr profile was also set up, named after the main slogan of the movement - We Are The 99 Percent. The blog became a place where members of the movement could interact, exchange photos and videos, and plan and organize their next steps. (Aronowitz, 2019) By October 15, 2011, the Occupy movement went global. Apart from 45 states and over 70 major cities in the US, the movement had spread worldwide. (The Guardian, 2011) On October 15, France24 reported that "the organisers, relying heavily on Facebook and Twitter, say demonstrations will be held in 951 cities across 82 countries in Europe, North America, Latin America, Asia and Africa." (Allemandou, 2011)

'Hashtag' movements

A hashtag is a core part of the social network Twitter that consists of the hashtag symbol followed by a word or a term. Hashtags are used to categorize a Twitter post by theme or subject matter, placing the post in a virtual space with other posts on the same topic. Hashtags allow Twitter to create millions of sub-spaces on the platform and enable users to direct their posts to a certain audience, while also allowing them to locate their interests on the site quickly.

Hashtags are convenient for spreading a message online, considering that, most of the time, one look at a hashtag is enough to understand what the topic under the hashtag is. For example, the hashtag #WorldCup was one of the most shared hashtags in 2018, during the 2018 FIFA World Cup. One click at the hashtag led to millions of posts, pictures and videos related to the football tournament. Seeing as hashtags are successful in gathering masses around a certain topic, it is no wonder that social movements saw the potential hashtags had in spreading messages on certain causes. Although the usage of the hashtag in this matter originated on Twitter, it quickly spread to Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, as well as other internet websites that often use hashtags as a way to highlight keywords.

ALS #IceBucketChallenge

Back in July of 2014, a challenge under the name 'ALS Ice Bucket Challenge' went viral. ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, is a rare, progressive neurological disease that is currently still uncurable. ALS causes degeneration of motor neurons, which means that every human function that involves the use of muscles is affected by the disease. On average, patients diagnosed with ALS die within five years of the first signs of the disease. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) The origins of the movement can be traced back to a golfer from Florida, Chris Kennedy, who was nominated by a friend to participate in the challenge. At the time, the challenge was not tied to a certain charity, but participants would choose to support their own cause when completing the challenge. Chris Kennedy chose ALS because of a relative, completed the challenge and uploaded it to Twitter. The video reached Pat Quinn, a man with ALS, who already had an online community to support him,

but the movement did not go fully viral until Pete Frates, who also had ALS and an even larger internet following, posted his own video of the challenge on his Facebook account (Sifferlin, 2014). From that point, the movement became an international sensation. The challenge consisted of people deciding between having a bucket of ice water poured on their heads, or donating 100 dollars to organizations related to ALS. In the weeks following Pete Frates' post, celebrities like Kobe Bryant, LeBron James, Oprah, Cristiano Ronaldo, Bill Gates, and many more became participants of the challenge, which greatly contributed to the movement. (Stenovec, 2017) By August 25, the online movement raised over 98 million dollars in donations (A lesson from the ice bucket challenge: using social networks to publicize science), with the hashtags related to the movement amassing 3,017,321 posts across social media platforms. (Clasen, 2014)

It is absolutely clear that the ALS ice bucket change would not be able to achieve a success that big had it been started in any other way, especially through traditional media. A research team on this topic from Berkley highlighted elements that made social media the optimal platform for this movement: accessibility for video taking and uploading, the interactive potential of social media in the form of 'tagging', and the omnipresence of the content and an interconnected global audience. (MoveMe Authorial Team)

#BlackLivesMatter

On February 26, 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was fatally shot by a police officer when walking home from the store. Although the teenager was unarmed, the police officer that shot him, George Zimmerman, claimed he pulled the trigger in self-defense. (Sentinel, 2013) In 2013, a jury found Zimmerman not guilty of any crime, a decision that caused national outrage and was the trigger for starting a social movement. (CNN, 2022)

The phrase 'black lives matter' was coined by Alicia Garza and Patrisse Cullors, black organizers, in a Facebook post that was a response to George Zimmerman's acquittal. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) Movement was then organized by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi, with the goal of shining a light on racism, discrimination, injustice and inequality black people suffer in the United States. (HUSL Library) Because of the constant recurrence of police brutality against black people in the US, Black Lives Matter only continued to grow in support and popularity. History repeated itself in 2014, when another unarmed teenager, Michael Brown, was shot and killed by a white police officer who was not indicted on any charges. (Moore, 2016)

It was only after the decision to release Darren Wilson, the police officer who killed Brown, was made that the #blacklivesmatter hashtag reached mass popularity - just hours after the decision, the hashtag was used 92,784 times on Twitter. (Demby, 2016)

Between 2014 and 2020, the BLM movement did not slow down with their work. In the span of six years, many more African-Americans fell victims to police brutality and other various forms of hate crimes: Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and many more. Their names became synonymous with the Black Lives Matter movement and for every one of these unjust deaths members of the movement would speak out, seeking justice and prosecution for the killers, but rarely getting the desired outcome.

This changed after the movement reached its highest point ever, in June of 2020. The uproar on social media was bigger than ever, and it came as a direct response to another black man being killed by a police officer. The police officer knelt on George Floyd's neck for several minutes, as is seen in a video captured and uploaded to the internet by a witness. The video took the world by the storm soon after it was uploaded, and George Floyd's final words were "I can't breathe", a sentence that would be repeated in every protest that would follow his death. The hashtag was used more than 50 million times on Twitter in just the first week following Floyd's death. This time, however, the uproar did not just stay on social media but transcended onto the streets, with protests in every American state. Social media remained a supporting tool to the movement, providing news, raising awareness on relevant issues, coordinating the efforts on the streets, and demanding change and policy changes. (Santoro, 2020) ACLED reports that there were over 7,750 demonstrations, from ending of May to late August of 2020, related to George Floyd's murder and the Black Lives Matter movement, 2,440 locations. Nearly 95% of these demonstrations were peaceful. (Kishi, 2022)

The Black Lives Matter movement started and completely evolved on social media. From the initial post that started the movement, years of lobbying for change and raising awareness for systematic racism embedded in the foundation of the US, to the actual protests on the streets ultimately lead to prosecution of George Floyd's killers.

#MarchForOurLives

Just days after the mass shooting that took place in their high school, four students, survivors of the shooting, founded the Never Again campaign. On Valentine's day 2018, a gunman entered the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, and took the lives of 17 people. The students knew that action needed to be taken, so they formed their campaign and announced the March for Our Lives, set for the following month, March 24. (Cooper, 2018)

The students, organizers of the movement and the march, utilized the power of social media immediately after starting the campaign. The Twitter account @AMarch4OurLives was made just days after the shooting, and quickly became the designated space for information and education on gun violence in the United States, raising awareness on the lack of gun control and organizing the march and related events.

The #MarchForOurLives soon became viral, even more so after celebrities like George and Amal Clooney, Lady Gaga, Selena Gomez, Kim Kardashian and many more used the hashtag and promised their participation in the march, as well as pledging donations to the fight against gun violence. (Aggeler, 2018) The students' efforts to gather support and mobilise people to action were more than successful; March for Our Lives was dubbed "one of the biggest youth protests since the Vietnam War." The main protest in Washington, D.C. attracted around 800,000 participants, but other, sister events are included, March For Our Lives had 1.2 million people on the streets across the United States calling for immediate gun control. (Lopez, 2018) As for social media, Twitter alone saw close to 4 million posts related to the hashtag #MarchForOurLIves, as well as related hashtags #NeverAgain and #EnoughIsEnough.

Perhaps it was due to the age of this movement's organisers that March For Our Lives was so successful. The teenagers realised just how influential social media can be. They seized the potential of multiple social media platforms: a Twitter account was set up and became active just a few days after the shooting, a smart move when wanting to capture the attention and seize the momentum and the spotlight that was going to be on them anyway. Instagram was used for members with a low participatory level, those who were willing to spread information, news and awareness, but generally would not protest on the streets.

Nevertheless, their participation was important for building a social media presence of the movement and keeping a continuous place in the news feeds. What was unique about this movement's utilization of social media was the way Snapchat was used. Snapchat, mostly used by teenagers and young adults, has a feature called 'Snap Map' which shows heat spots on the places where there is a significant amount of activity occurring. On March 24 2018, the map was flooded with anti-gun control violence all over the United States. March For Our lives made a big impact, perhaps the biggest when it comes to seeking a higher level of regulation for gun ownership and use. The Berkley student research team summarized the changes made since the start of the movement in 2018:

- the STOP School Violence Act of 2018 was passed
- 7 states passed laws stressing the need for stricter background checks and having a set minimum age to when owning and accessing a firearm
- 10 states reinforced their policies around bump stocks (devices used to make it easier to fire rounds from a semi-automatic) to prevent people from easily accessing and using semi-automatic weapons
- 9 states allow family, police, or other community members to prevent at-risk people from getting access to firearms.
- 9 states passed laws to fund gun reduction programs in urban locations

(#MoveMe - A Guide to Social Movements & Social Media)

#MeToo

In the fall of 2017, Hollywood was rocked by an overwhelming number of sexual abuse accusations against the famed producer Harvey Weinstein. Jodi Kantor and Megan published an article in the New York Times on October 5 named "Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades." The article detailed instances of sexual abuse Weinstein committed in his many years in the industry, while also naming some of the victims (the list included actresses Rose McGowan and Ashley Judd, amongst others) (Kantor & Twohey, 2017).

On October 5, American actress Alyssa Milano sent out a tweet that would start a social movement. *"If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet."* This tweet singlehandedly started an open conversation on an issue that has long been a taboo topic in our society - sexual harassment and assault. The tweet came from a public account and was, therefore, visible to everyone, and everyone could interact with it. Overnight, Milano received thousands of responses with people sharing their experiences and breaking the stigma around openly talking about their traumas. A hashtag once again

went viral - #MeToo was used 1.7 million times, in 85 countries in the first week following Alyssa Milano's tweet. Facebook garnered 12 million posts by 4.7 million users around the world in the first 24 hours. (MoveMe Authorial Team)

The openness of the #MeToo movement made many victims realise that they were not alone in their experiences, and, if a person sexually abused them, chances are they abused someone else, as well. Communities formed and the movement took off. The world witnessed the fall of many powerful men from various industries, as victims continued to come forward with their experiences. Famously, the Hollywood actor Kevin Spacey, comedian Bill Cosby, and singer R. Kelly are among the many accused for sexual crimes.

The semi-anonymous nature of the internet, specifically Twitter, enabled people to share their experiences with others. The vast reach of social media allowed everyone, no matter where they come from, to join the conversation, even if all they did was post the hashtag #MeToo without elaborating, indicating that they endured some form of sexual abuse throughout their life. The #MeToo created a safe space for all victims online, a place where people can share their experiences without being judged, or worse, losing their job or social status.

The strong influence of the movements quickly surpassed the limits of social media and found its way into traditional media outlets. For their annual choice of 'Person of the Year', Time magazine picked the "The Silence Breakers" - men and women behind the #MeToo movement, people who created and promoted a platform for openly speaking out about sexual assault and harassment, for 2017. (Zacharek et al., 2017)

#TakeAKnee

In the 2016 NFL preseason, a quarterback for San Francisco 49ers notably decided to sit down in protest during the national anthem. The player, Colin Kaepernick, knelt during the anthem for the rest of the season, as a sign of a peaceful protest against the police brutality against black people in the United States. (Wyche, 2020) When asked to state his reasons for kneeling he said:

> I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color [...] To me, this is bigger than football and it would be selfish on my part to look

the other way. There are bodies in the street and people getting paid leave and getting away with murder. (Colin Kaepernick for Steve Wyche (2016))

Kaepernick continued to kneel for the rest of the season, with more and more players, from different NFL teams, joining him in silent protest. (Kay, 2017) The #TakeAKnee hashtag was born, but it did not quite gather mass attention outside of the sport. In fact, it was Donald Trump who made the movement take off. It was not until then-president Donald Trump condemned the act of taking a knee at a Republican rally, saying it was NFL owners should fire players for showcasing that kind of disrespect to the American heritage. Trump continued to be outspoken about his views later on Twitter, which is when the movement garnered the attention of the general public. (Willingham, 2017) In the two days following Trump's tweets regarding the new movement in the NFL, the hashtag #TakeAKnee was used in 2.2 million different tweets and had also become popular on Facebook and Instagram (McLean's, 2017).

While social media, particularly Twitter, was witnessing Trump's opposition to the movement, a new hashtag arose. #BoycottNFL gained popularity among the community that stood with president Donald Trump and his views that the protests in the NFL are anti-patriotic. The ones using the hashtag vowed to not attend or watch any more NFL games unless the protesting players are fired. The users of the #BoycottNFL found the act of kneeling for the national anthem disrespectful to the country and its history. However, this opposing movement was not able to gain as much traction as the original #TakeAKnee hashtag - #BoycottNFL has been shared around 131,000 times. (BBC, 2017) #TakeAKnee movement continued to grow, both on social media and offline. The practice spread outside of the National Football League (NFL) to other sports. It has become common to take a knee before the game, match, race, during a national anthem or at a designated time for it. Many sports embraced the act of taking a knee against racial abuse that is, to this day, present in all sports, from football to motorsport, to everything in between.

Criticisms of social movements on social media

Author Zeynep Tufekci has done extensive research on the relationship between social media and social movements and, aside from the numerous benefits social media brings to social movements, she also highlights the negative aspect social media often has on collective action. She emphasizes that, while social media makes it easier to mobilize the members of a social movement, it does not guarantee the success of the movement. In fact, more often than not, social movements that relied solely on mobilizing people online did not have a desired outcome. (Tufekci, 2017)

Tufekci continues that this occurrence happens because the internet offers taking the 'fast routes' which cannot be a replacement for hard work put into organizing a movement. Arguing that slow and sustained route is proven to be more successful, Tufekci offers a look back at the past - to the Civil Rights movement. African-American community took years organizing, planning and executing each step of their plan for change. They worked hard every day, while facing oppression and numerous obstacles along the way, which only strengthened their collective identity. Through the years of working together, they had to take risks and adapt in times of uncertainty and political change. All this collective effort produced a strong foundation, one that is crucial if a social movement is ever going to succeed. (Tufekci, 2014)

> The way technology helps power social movements, can also paradoxically help weaken them (Tufekci, 2014)

When popularity of social media as a tool for social movement started to rise, so did the occurrence of *slacktivism*. Slactivism, as Christiansen (2011) has defined it, comprises of "political activities that have no impact on real-life political outcomes, but only serve to increase the feel-good factor of the participants". In other words, slacktivism is a term for a very low level of participation in social movements, "online form of self-aggrandizing, politically ineffective activism.". (Cabrera et al., 2017) Most forms of slacktivism include liking posts on social media, reposting images and videos, signing online petition, all with hopes it helps a certain cause. Washburn (2021) gives a great example of when slacktivism was not only useless, but also dangerous - #blackouttuesday. The hashtag appeared in June 2020, at the height of Black Lives Matter Protests.

#blackouttuesday intended to show support to protests against police brutality, and it did so by instructing social media users to post an image of a black square to their profiles. The hashtag became flooded with posts in no time, many people wanted to be involved in the Black Lives Matter protests, and by doing this they felt useful and helpful. However, the flood of posts on social media proved to be damaging to the movement; with so many posts, the instructions, information, plans and awareness that social media creators and activist were posting got lost and #blackouttuesday became meaningless. (Washburn, 2021)

Social media also tends to simplify complex social issues. This is, perhaps, due to the fact that social media is dominated by users aged 12 to 30. Users have a tendency to look at societal issues as if they were 'black or white', taking a stance on one side of the other, without thinking about the depth and intricacy of social issues. Washburn (2021) also argues that social media simply does not have the tools for tackling social issues and creating social movements. The complexity of conversations on human rights, for example, just does not have its place on social media, where participatory and membership levels are extremely low.

Conclusion

Social movements found their way to the Internet back in the 1990s. When social media appeared, it was soon clear that there would be ways for social movements to utilize certain features of it. In the beginning, social movements had their own space on social media, separate from the mainstream. Over time, social media spaces that hosted social movements and those that hosted entertainment blended, bringing social media to the forefront of social media content. While social media helped dramatically in the earlier movements, those like Iran and the Middle East, these days social media is not as useful.

These days, social media is oversaturated with social movements so that most movements do not have many high-level participation level members, which is important when demanding change.

Because they are on social media, social movements become a part of the social media culture, a culture that is susceptible to trends. This means that social media is ever-changing and evolving, but also that content on social media easily becomes outdated, which is why collective action on social media often goes from social movements – to social 'moments'.

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