

## **A s s i g n m e n t   # 1**

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**Title: Web 2.0 Effect on Society's Engagement with Activism**

### *Conference Paper*

**Name:** Alice McAuliffe  
**Student Number:** 19155685  
**Unit Name:** Social Media, Communities and Networks  
**Email Address:** 19155685@studentcurtin.edu.au  
**Date Submitted:**  
**Word Count:** 2286

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## **Web 2.0 Effect on Society's Engagement with Activism**

**Alice McAuliffe**

**Curtin University**

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the ways in which Web 2.0 has modernized how society fights for social justice and engages with activism. Through the exploration of the key components of activism: community, communication, collaboration, organisation and participation, it is noted how Web 2.0 tools and platforms have individually affected each component.

*Keywords:* Web 2.0, Social networking Sites, collaboration, digital democracy, online activism

### **Web 2.0 Effect on Society's Engagement with Activism and Fight for Social Justice**

Society's fight for social justice has been revolutionized by the introduction of Web 2.0. This new way to fight for social justice, can also be distinguished as online activism, clicktivism and digital democracy. Web 2.0 refers to the "second generation of the Web, wherein interoperable, user centred web applications and services promote social connectedness, media and information sharing, user created content, and collaboration

among individuals and organisations” (Wilson, Lin, Longstreet & Sarker, 2011, p2). This has been the case due to Web 2.0 platforms: Microblogging sites, such as Twitter and Tumblr, Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, and content-sharing services like Instagram and YouTube; and Web 2.0 tools: instant messaging, tweeting, hash tagging, making a status, commenting, tagging and sharing. Together, tools and platforms create the Web 2.0 features, resulting in increased usability, efficiency and a user rich experience (Arya & Mishra, 2012). Web 2.0 has allowed for new forms of community, communication, collaboration, participation, and organising - all key components that make up successful activism. Each component has been individually affected by Web 2.0 and is incredibly intertwined, resulting in huge shifts in society’s engagement with activism and the fight for social justice.

### **Communities**

Before the introduction of Web 2.0, community had a core definition that described its key elements as “a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings” (MacQueen et al., 2001). Community has and always will be an essential component in how society fights for social justice. Beniger (1987) and Calhoun (1980) both acknowledge that community has a high social influence on human behaviour, and therefore through communities, an individual’s attitudes about social justice issues and

activism is influenced. As mentioned in the above definition, community was previously associated with a particular geographic area, such as a neighbourhood, assuming community members met face-to-face to discuss common topics of interest (Wellman & Gulia, 1999). The introduction of Web 2.0 challenged this belief, coining the term 'virtual communities'. Virtual communities are known as an online destination for people with common topics of interest or goals to communicate via the internet (Dennis, Pootheri, & Natarajan, 1998; Figallo, 1998). As noted by Blanchard & Markus (2004), these virtual communities incorporate a feeling of belonging, influence and shared emotional connection. These online communities are enabled through major platforms that Web 2.0 enabled. Web 2.0's introduction of virtual communities further challenged the original definition of community, as it acknowledged that anyone with access to the internet can potentially find and become a part of a virtual community that reaches a worldwide audience (Cormode & Krishnamurthy, 2008; O' Reilly, 2007). Due to Web 2.0 being a global phenomenon that has resulted in limited geographical, there are also limited boundaries to how far digital revolution may evolve (Mutsvairo, 2016). This signifies how Web 2.0 has made it easier for like-minded people to find their fitting community despite their physical location, allowing both joining and forming communities to be significantly easier (Faris, 2008). Web 2.0 platforms further allows individuals to spread their communities' values and beliefs to a larger sphere of people than previously possible, as on SNS social ties can be rapidly made through network connections. Due to communities converging online, forming a community through Web 2.0 platform has allowed contemporary activists to shamelessly appropriate SNSs,

microblogging services, and content-sharing sites, resulting in what is now known as the 'Twitter Revolution'. Through the platforms provided by Web 2.0, the fight for social justice can be taken part in through revolutionized communication, collaboration, participation, and organization.

### **Communication and Collaboration**

Communication can be defined as the practice of conveying information from one entity or group to another in order to arrive at a common understanding (Keyton, 2011).

Before the introduction of the Internet and Web 2.0, communication relied on in-person and physical signals. (Baruah, 2012). In ancient times this meant smoke signals, fires and drumming, and by the 18<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> Century, evolved to the use of letters, telegraph, telephone and radio (Baruah, 2012). This limited the speed and distance that activism could reach. Web 2.0 allowed for a shift from mass media, which promoted many-to-one communication, to interactive media, such as SNS, which allow many-to-many communication (Arya & Mishra, 2012). Access to Web 2.0 tools and platforms means that; communication has become more frequent; communication isn't limited by distance and time; and response time has greatly diminished (Baruah, 2012). Activists have made full use of these new features of communication on the "group of internet based applications ... that allow the creation and exchange" of communication and collaboration (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, pp. 60). SNS's provide "simple, inexpensive ways to organize members, arrange meetings, spread information, and gauge opinion"

(Ellison, Lampe, and Steinfield, 2009, p.8). The abundance and diversity of practices made possible by Web 2.0 mean that communication and collaboration used by activists is almost as “diverse as their venues” (Gerbuado, 2012, pp. 3). Web 2.0 provided the introduction of new tools for communication and collaboration to progress, and continue to progress. These tools include; instant messaging, tweeting, hash tagging, making a status, commenting, tagging and sharing (Pillay & Maharaj, 2018). Hashtags are a leading tool used in online communication and collaboration that was made popular due to the introduction of Web 2.0 tools and platforms. The use of the hashtag to was seen in the uprisings of #ArabSpring, when in December 2010 a revolutionary movement overthrew the rulers of many Arab States from power. Hashtags were an effective tool during this wave of activism to communicate, collaborate, and raise awareness (Beaumont, 2011). Hashtags allow communication and collaboration in this fight for social justice, as they enable organisation of uprisers, and harmony in working towards a common goal as community, in order to spread a social justice message (Beaumont, 2011). The use of the hashtag combined with the function of Web 2.0 in the Arab Spring uprisings accelerated the revolution, and enabled the cause to sweep nations globally. The use of online automatic translation applied to SNS also assisted activists in reaching an audience that spoke almost any language, enabling further connections with more online users and virtual communities (Howard et al., 2011). The use of the hashtag in this circumstance may seem exaggerated, but it truly demonstrates the influence communication and collaboration through Web 2.0 has had on spreading a message in order to fight for social justice.

### Participation

The way society participates in activism and fighting for social justice has been revolutionised since the introduction of Web 2.0. Participation both before, and after the introduction of Web 2.0 can be defined as “*action by ordinary citizens directed towards influencing some political outcomes*” (Brady, 1999, p. 737). The concept of participation itself radically changed with the introduction of Web 2.0 platforms, which allowed for online participatory culture. Micheletti and McFarland (2011) note that conventional forms of participation, such as voting, marches and protests, are no longer the only ways people can engage in the fight for social justice (Micheletti and McFarland, 2011). Jenkins et al., (2005) notes that an increased access to the Web 2.0 has runs vital role in how people engage with online participatory culture, due to its ability to allow people to work in a collaborative nature; create and distribute ideas; and connect with individuals who have common goals and ideas. Web 2.0 platforms, such as SNS’s, microblogging and content-sharing sites have introduced the opportunity for vast, online participation in activism (Rotman et al., 2011). Online participatory culture has encouraged direct and immediate involvement in public discourse and political participation as Web 2.0 platforms provide stimulus, assistance, and incitement for involvement (Kann, Berry, Gant, Zager, 2017). Web 2.0 allows for far more participation activities then previously. These activities are diverse and range from: citizen journalism, online voting, electronic petitions, online profile representation, and use of social media

for information distribution (Dalton, 2006). For example, participation in the fight for social justice can be noted in citizen journalism, the practice of ordinary people and not professional journalists, using Web 2.0 platforms to report about issues that currently matter to them. The form of participation in activism as citizen journalism is often used to elicit 'external attraction' (Aday et al., 2010). Citizen journalism when fighting for social justice could be seen during the #BlackLivesMatter movement, as citizen journalists posted videos to SNS to show police brutality to innocent black citizens. Web 2.0 and the creation of SNS's, microblogging and content sharing sites have distorted the image of activism participation into what has become known as micro-activism or slacktivism (Morozov, 2009; Christensen, 2011). This refers to bottom-up activities by a community that affects society on a small personal scale. Micro-activism generally suggests that online participation activities are engaged in because they are easily performed and result in feel-good emotions rather than an achieved goal (Morozov, 2009). Micro-activism has caused concern, as it is believed to influence likely participants to engage online, instead of engaging in the range of participation activities that are traditionally used in 'real life' (Putnam, 2000; Christensen, 2011). Shulman (2009) implies that slacktivism is not always capable in producing effective outcomes. Whilst there are both positive and negative connotations about the effect of Web 2.0 on participation, there is no doubt the way in which society participates in the fight for a social justice issue has been revolutionised.



### Organizing

The way online communities organize their fight for social justice has evolved due to the introduction of Web 2.0 tools and platforms. The organisation of an activist movement originally involved petitioning, handing out fliers and talking to others in order to organise a march or protest, which took time, effort and money to spread awareness (Madison, 2017). Historically, protests had to be organized and headed by one person, such as the civil rights movement which was directed by Martin Luther King Jr., where he was seen as the voice for everyone involved, essentially taking a top-down approach from the issues raised within the public sphere (Madison, 2017). Now, Web 2.0 provided the tools and platforms to allow more efficient organizing of 'real-life' activism (Garrett, 2006). Using SNS, a social justice movement can be spread broadly. This is due to the potential 'sharing' with social ties through networked community members. This tactic requires minimal energy and knowledge, reducing resources needed to organize and mobilize a movement (Earl & Elliot, 2018; Ayres, 1999; Bennett, *et al.*, 2008). Due to the ease and accessibility of participating in activism online there is a sense of direct democracy, using a networked model of organizing (Madison, 2017). An example of this, is the organization of the Women's March 2017. The Women's March was a protest in January 2017, held due to uproar created after the election of President Donald Trump. The day after Trump was elected, a Facebook event was created by women who invited friends, and friends of friends, to march in protest in Washington. In a united front, women of all different races, backgrounds and popularity shared the event, which quickly led to multitudes of women signing up to march. It became the largest single-

day protest in U.S. history, and shows how organisation with the use of Web 2.0 tools requires minimal expertise, effort and time. Organisation now also means considering that using Web 2.0 tools and platforms increases the number and diversity of people involved. This can be a positive and negative affect, as it can allow state observation (Madison, 2017). Web 2.0 organisation has also been dominated by what has been termed the "Facebook-like apathy", where people may react positively to an event online, and click "going" when they have no intention of actually showing up. (Madison, 2017). Comparing Web 2.0 to the past, the revolution of organization in terms of activism becomes obvious, whether it be for the better or worse.

### **Conclusion**

The revolutionary impact of Web 2.0 can be pinpointed to the introduction and application of Web 2.0 platforms: Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, microblogging services such as Twitter, and content-sharing sites such as YouTube; and Web 2.0 tools: instant messaging, tweeting, hash tagging, making a status, commenting, tagging and sharing. Together these tools and platforms resulted in huge shifts in the ways that activism is approached online, as there are no barriers of distance, time or cost. As a global phenomenon, Web 2.0 has broken down geographical barriers and boundaries, allowing a sense of community, as well as the beliefs and values that go with it, to span distances that were previously impossible with the neighbourhood, face-to-face definition. In addition to this, communication is no longer limited by time or

response time, and tools that simply did not previously exist, such as hashtags, have become integral in the awareness of social justice issues, accelerating collaboration and revolution. Online participatory culture allows and encourages participation in public discourse, and gives users the sense of having engaged, despite online action possibly discouraging people from getting involved in 'real life' activism activities. The way these online communities organise their fight for social justice has evolved, with Web 2.0 tools requiring minimal expertise, effort, and time, and increasing the number and diversity of people involved.

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