

“How social media has become a place for people to uphold civil rights and equality”

Abstract

Social media has changed the level of engagement and participation of the importance of upholding civil rights and equality in people's mind. It is really encouraging that the technology of the digital world has provoked people's interest about unfair social issues and people nowadays are highly engaged in enhancing the social environment through online interaction. As the freedom of speech is being emphasized in this generation, the discussion of one of the most concerned social issues regarding civil rights and social equality, has become a normal social phenomenon among the society, in which democracy is what people are really looking for, and it is what people highly value. Therefore, the discussion of this conference paper is “how social media has become a place for people to uphold civil rights and equality”, scholars' evidence will be used to support this statement. This paper argues about how people engage in the specific social issue across different social media platforms with certain characteristics and features, such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, and how the protest movement in the future will be affected and organized.

Keywords: #community #socialmovement #socialmedia #equality #civilright

Introduction

Social media refers to digital platforms that allow interactions and engagement between users and communities, platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are the most used platforms among social media users. The way that people engage with one another based on their preference and interests through different platforms forms the online communities for different interest groups. Online communities work in a way that people are connecting with other users digitally. It is undeniable that social media has completely changed the way information flows through different platforms, and dramatically boosted the speed of the flow of information. Social media has the power of generating huge traffic among different online platforms and enables the information to be passed through the word-of-mouth, since the nature of social media includes two-way communication as people have the freedom and right to comment and share their thoughts on basically

everything that is posted. The effectiveness and high speed of the flow of information enable people to have access to global news regarding social issues, the Internet allows people to engage in the discussion of the issue through different digital platforms, social networks and social media platforms form a significant part of this engagement.

Social Media & Background of Civil Right and Equality

Social media has become one of the major sources where we are getting the latest news from, since social media allows internet users to share the content to others in a faster and more efficient way, we just have to click the share button, and we are then able to share the messages and the news to more audiences, whether they are interested or not. For example, Instagram is a social media platform that users can post photos and videos along with written content in the form of feed post, story, reels, and IGTV videos, which allows users use this platform as a medium of communication. A study on Google Scholar has indicated that over 70% of people who aged from 12- to 24-year-old are using Instagram and have an account for themselves (Huang & Su, 2018). According to a research conducted by Pew Research Center based in the U.S, and based on different races who use at least one social media platform, 69% of U.S. adults are people with white skin, 77% of the adults are with black skin, and 80% are in other races (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Before we dip into the relationship between social networks and civil rights, as well as equality, it is necessary to look at the background of civil rights and equality first. Civil right movement is a broad term that is used to categorize the activism of upholding and protecting the rights in relation to political, social, and economic, in which this movement was initially started by the argument of pursuing the equal treatment of African American during the late eighteen centuries (Khan Academy, n.d.). The equality in terms of different races, the impact of the built-culture for decades has the most influence on people's perspectives based on others' skin colours and the divergence in ethnicity, which has aroused the problem of racism and mistreatment within the field of different skin colours as well as gender role (Banerjee et al., 2020)

How has social media influenced the way people are protesting and fighting for civil rights and equality compared with the past? One of the traits of social media is that it

allows certain situations in terms of fairness to become visible, meaning that social media enables us to clearly identify the reality, brutality, and injustices (Ovide, 2020). As these situations in real life become transparent and identifiable, we are able to make changes, and take actions, maximizing the invisible potential of social media in a way that we could build a community with equal treatments.

It is undeniable that the spread of social media usage will never slow down as 86% of the social media users log on to their social media account at least once a day, while 72% of the users use multiple times in a day (Herhold, 2018). Social media platforms are the third place for people to communicate digitally, people are allowed to share their thoughts, perspectives, and attitude towards social issues, in which the freedom of speech enables people to find someone who is fighting for civil rights and is dedicated to build a society with equal status through online platforms. The way people find themselves relatable to the content that they are interested in is because of the way social media works, which is interest-orientated contents (Foundation, 2021).

Researchers have indicated that the level of intensity of the conversation on social media platforms has a close relationship with the participation of protest activities in the future (Choudhury et al., 2016). Social media enable people to organize protest movement through social media platforms that have the “group chat” and “event” features such as Facebook, as long as they have the internet connection and social media accounts, which the power of word-of-mouth can have a significant impact on directing the movement to certain results (Barnett, n.d.).

Black Lives Matter – The Death of George Floyd Went Viral on Social Media

A historical tragedy happened in 2020 that has proven the power of having access to global news is the death of George Floyd, which the case has undeniably become a history in the world, with his life being taken by American police, this had created social movement both on social media, and in real life, with people protesting that every life should be treated equally. The footage of George Floyd being murdered by the police officer had gone viral on various social media platforms, including Instagram, which allowed international feedback and response given that people have access to global news. People on Instagram were using the features of sharing, commenting, and reacting to the information on the platforms. This has

shown the effect of the way Instagram works in engaging people in different patterns, as a study conducted in 2015 showed that “96.87% of all engagements were likes while 3.13% were comments”, (Mullane, 2015). Instagram users are able to post about their thoughts in relation to this specific social issue regarding human rights and civil rights, showing their position in protesting the mistreatment of life, people who have the same opinion came together to fight against the unfairness by sharing the relevant posts to their feeds. This movement on Instagram can create huge traffic and form online communities where people are united digitally, the power of united online communities can lead to the results of people actually making changes and taking actions offline.

The tragedy has also brought the social issue named “Black Lives Matter” back to the public light, it was all over the newspaper sites and every social media platform, even though this tragedy originally happened in the United States, people from different countries are able to have access to the latest information and updates of the death of George Floyd and “Black Lives Matter” through social media platforms and digital newspaper sites. In other words, social networking and social media platforms allow the conversations of the “Black Lives Matter” events and protests to be spread and discussed from domestic to global. On the other hand, what is really worth bringing into this conference paper is the use of hashtags on social media such as Instagram and Twitter. Hashtags were being used across different social media platforms to raise the awareness of the social issue, for instance, people were using the hashtag #BlackoutTuesday and #BlackLivesMatter (Mediakix, n.d.). Within the first month since the tragedy, the name of George Floyd was being mentioned on social media platforms, sites, and blogs, for about 1.1 billion times (Beckman, 2020).

How are hashtags useful?

Hashtag refers to the tagging of a specific content in a form of the theme being specified and labelled, it is mostly used on social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. An example to illustrate the way hashtags present would be #civilright, #socialjustice, #equality, or as mentioned before, #BlackLivesMatter. Instagram users are able to follow the hashtags of different topics or themes that they are interested in, and wish to get the updates about content that are related to the hashtags they followed. The use of hashtags plays a significant role in the

contribution of bringing the public together as it enables users to quickly find the content that is relevant to the preferred topic, as “hashtags for such situations also provide a way for the public to express their sentiment — something many of us feel compelled to do in the case of a disaster”, (Campbell, 2018). The motivation for social media users to include hashtags about the topic that they are discussing beyond the topic itself, the motivation involves a certain level of connection and interest between the users using the same hashtags.

Conclusion

In conclusion, social media has created a networked public and communities on cyberspace in a way that people are not necessary to communicate and interact in person and still able to organize events, bringing the power of unity to combat unfairness in the reality. It is obvious that having access to social media is important in building a world with peace and love, enabling more people to have the courage to fight for equality. Since social media users are able to connect with others based on what they have followed, or what they are interested in due to the nature of social media as it will bring people who have the same interest together. As the freedom of speech is highly valued and emphasized especially in the online environment, people can motivate each other by sharing their experiences, thoughts, and opinion, regardless of different races or skin colours.

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