

TECH3022-17 Advanced Social Media Production

Workshop Eighteen – Evaluating Digital Activism

1 Digital Activism

“In the digital age, the Internet provides every one of us with a megaphone” (Karpf, 2010, p. 152).

“Never before have the powers of self-publishing in video, audio, or written format been so widely accessible to so many” (Karpf, 2010, p. 151).

“If a half million people sign an online petition to end poverty, reduce global warming emissions, or overthrow a repressive regime, what effect does that actually have?” (Karpf, 2010, p. 151).

1.1 The New Change-Makers: An Introduction to Digital Activism

The Berkman's own initiative for Internet & Society produced this video, which investigates the tools, strategies, and effects of digital activism while also moving towards crafting a definition of the emergent social movement. <https://youtu.be/TqJEQTX7xkU>

1.2 The Power of Organizing Without Organizations

The Internet, social networking and peer-to-peer (p2p) communication have transformed how people connect, as well as the scope, scale and speed of mass collaborations. This transformation has opened the door for self-emerging and increasingly complex virtual forums, allowing individuals to collaborate and organize from worlds apart. <https://youtu.be/SvhkgSFq170>

2 Measuring Digital Activism

“This chapter focuses on two different types of metrics used in digital activism: tactical and strategic. Tactical measurements count the number of signatures, visits, blog posts, etc. They provide indicators of how many individuals have taken some action related to your campaign. Strategic metrics, on the other hand, measure success. They require a clear theory of how you expect your tactics to make a difference, in turn clarifying which measures actually contribute to a win or a loss” (Karpf, 2010, p. 151).

2.1 Youth Digital Activism

This was a panel presentation for the 47th Symposium on International Relations - Social Media: Global Impact on Political Engagement, Youth & Privacy on April 8, 2016 at Yale University in New Haven, CT. <https://youtu.be/7eY9JN-b8gM>

3 Activist Tools

“Successful activist campaigns have always come down to a set of people mobilizing the resources at their disposal to either affect the choices of powerful decision makers or to replace those actors with others more attuned to the beliefs and preferences of the people. To accomplish this goal, activists use the tools at their disposal to educate their fellow citizens and mobilize pressure tactics” (Karpf, 2010, p. 152).

“Online or offline, large or small, mainstream or radical, success in all forms of activism must be judged at the strategic, rather than the tactical, level. And, while the availability of online engagement platforms leads to a slew of tactical data, it can also make measurement of success all the more difficult” (Karpf, 2010, p. 152).

3.1 Sophie Hostick Boakye- Digital Activism: How communities can campaign using free online tools

Digital Shoreditch 2013 celebrating outstanding creativity. <https://youtu.be/kcuYdzmTw0M>

3.2 YouTube Tips For Vegan Activists

YouTube is probably the best tool for Vegans trying to help others to make the connection. Here are all my best tips for creating a channel and making it grow as fast as possible.

<https://youtu.be/TcvFZNxpiOo>

3.3 Accidental Activist

Becoming an advocate for LGBT equality was totally unexpected and completely life-changing. I never imagined that I would travel the world, sharing my story, mostly because I never thought I had anything worth saying. Finally speaking up for myself and fighting for equality have brought so much joy and meaning to my life. I truly believe that I have found my purpose in life; I owe it to myself, to my late partner Tom, and to anyone who is afraid to or can't speak up for themselves, never to give up. https://youtu.be/OU_4NnKleFc

4 Simple Counting?

“So, more followers, more tweets, and more re-tweets are all good. What does this mean for measuring success in digital activism? Is a digital activist with five thousand followers more successful than one with fifty? If we Twitter and get re-tweeted often enough, will that actually accomplish our goals? The answer, of course, is that it all depends on what you are trying to accomplish in your campaign” (Karpf, 2010, p. 152).

“While it is never a good idea to underestimate the power of a new medium, this rampant optimism about tactical measures should give us pause” (Karpf, 2010, p. 152).

“Those who need to be persuaded often are not even using the medium and certainly aren't following elite conservative politicians. The same can be said for many activist campaigns” (Karpf, 2010, p. 152).

5 Real Change

“But if major social or political changes could be accomplished merely by communicating with like-minded peers, such outcomes would be much easier to accomplish than they actually are. Successful political activism is hard, much harder than the tactical metrics would lead us to believe (Karpf, 2010, p. 154).

“Complicating the matter even further is an essential and unfortunate reality of digital activism: the tactic-level data are almost always suspect” (Karpf, 2010, p. 155).

6 Strategic Metrics

“Strategic metrics must be designed within the context of an activist campaign. Tactical metrics, though abundantly available, can be misleading” (Karpf, 2010, p. 156).

“If we can't judge Twitter influence directly by follower counts, Facebook strength by friend totals, or blog authority by hyperlinks alone, how are we to measure much of anything in the emerging world of digital politics?” (Karpf, 2010).

“The solution I generally recommend is to minimize errors by blending various types of data” (Karpf, 2010, p. 157).

“In thinking about strategic metrics, then, it is important to consider some of the classic concepts in activist campaigning. Famed Harvard professor and long-time labour organizer Marshall Ganz explains strategy as follows: ‘Strategy is about turning ‘what you have’ into ‘what you need’ to get ‘what you want’—how to turn resources into power . . . Strategic action is a way of acting, not an alternative to acting. It is acting with intentionality and mindfulness of one’s goals, as opposed to acting out of habit or impulse.’” (Karpf, 2010, p. 162).

7 Global Campaigns

“Activist campaigns in any locale across the globe seek to mobilize power, and this mobilization can and should be quantified. It is not simply measured by hyperlinks or clickrates, though. Identifying what to measure only becomes clear once we have figured out which actions (and in what quantities) a digital activist campaign seeks to encourage and pursue. How many online petition signatures are necessary to achieve a certain goal? Will change be accomplished by a broad outpouring of shallow support or by accessing and convincing one key individual? Either or both of these can be appropriate. Measurement can only happen after the question has been answered, however” (Karpf, 2010, p. 163).

“The digital revolution affects the range of tools available to both campaigns and brings with it a wealth of tactic-level data that can be used to judge either. Students of political change and the Internet must remain clear-eyed when evaluating this data, however, because the numbers tell us little in the absence of a strategic logic” (Karpf, 2010, p. 163).

“Tactical measurements are the simple traffic numbers: Facebook friends, Twitter followers, blog posts, video views, e-petition signatures. They can be impressive in their own right, but also can easily mislead” (Karpf, 2010, p. 164).

8 References

Karpf, D. (2010). Measuring the Success of Digital Campaigns. In M. Joyce (Ed.), *Digital Activism Decoded - The New Mechanics of Change* (pp. 151 - 164). New York: Idebate Press.
Retrieved from <http://sec.cs.ucl.ac.uk/users/smurdoch/papers/digiact10all.pdf>.