



OFFLINE ACTIVISM: DOES IT TAKE MORE THAN ONLINE SOCIAL JUSTICE WARRIORS?

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KEY EVENTS

On April 23, 2021, Vishaal Sehijpaul presented at the 2021 CASIS Generation Z Congress on *Offline Activism: Does It Take More than Online Social Justice Warriors?* This presentation was followed by a group panel for questions and answers, whereby congress attendees were provided with an opportunity to engage in discussion with Mr. Sehijpaul. Primary discussion surrounded which types of safety were possibly more important, methods Generation Zs (Gen Zs) can adapt to potentially reduce their slacktivism, the role of government in addressing the gap between online and offline change, and whether slacktivism is relevant in current social issues, such the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

Mr. Sehijpaul began his presentation by examining three types of safety: personal safety, online safety, and public safety. Through this presentation, he explained the difference between online and offline activism, as well as what a social justice warrior (SJW) is. The strengths and weaknesses of SJWs were examined and the potential threats they may pose, including slacktivism and clicktivism, were presented. Finally, he presented on the general opportunities of social media, with a focus on activism.

Question Period

During the question period, discourse about the importance of various types of safety and the role of government in potentially addressing the gap between online and offline activism occurred. Gen Zs were the forefront of this discussion and their ability to possibly reduce slacktivism, such as the BLM movement, was covered.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Personal safety, online safety, and public safety are all important and can possibly be affected through the use of online platforms. Online activism is a form of activism done through an online platform of some sort, such as Instagram or TikTok. Whereas, offline activism is a form of activism done in the real world, through face to face communications, flyers, posters, or in-person protests. A SJW is a contemptuous term for a person who advocates for a progressive orthodoxy, often on the internet, especially involving the treatment of ethnic, racial, or gender-identity.

Online activism may be useful, as it arguably results in sharing valuable information that may not be common knowledge, attracts audiences, and has platforms to educate a wide range of people used by SJWs. Social media can generally facilitate easy access to information and is debatably simple to navigate for usage by Gen Zs.

Conversely, SJWs may possess some weaknesses. For example, they may be acting with their personal biases and not accurately fact checking, which may result in the spread of misinformation. This may possibly contribute to the spread of conspiracy theories and clickbait. Clickbait refers to something that is designed to attract attention and to entice users to click a link and read, view, or listen to the piece of online content that could be deceptive, sensationalized, or misleading. In addition to this, there appears to be no real change resulting from the link between technology, government, and citizens.

A potential threat from corporate companies that take advantage also exists. For example, 'change.org' allegedly kept the money that resulted from donations relating to the George Floyd case for themselves. Another example relates to Cambridge Analytica, who used Facebook to manipulate votes for elections. Other potential threats include 'slacktivism', a form of activism which means to put in little to no effort behind activism, which is commonly seen on social media

and online activism. This is similar to ‘clicktivism’, which puts a little more effort to understand what is happening, but only through social media.

Although there are many threats that may arise from the use of social media, it provides many possible opportunities, such as the ability to communicate, foster creative users, and make real change through activism.

Question Period

During the question period, Mr. Sehijpaul explained his view of public and personal safety being of most importance to him. For example, the recent FedEx facility shooting in Indianapolis is arguably indicative of an ongoing public safety risk. He explained that there is an overlap between public and personal safety by providing an example of his desire to feel safe in public space as a person of colour.

Another question led to discussion about the role of Gen Z actors and government in online safety that transfers to offline safety. Mr. Sehijpaul added that the government may play a key role in bridging the gap between online and offline activism, as they can potentially educate individuals, particularly Gen Z, who debatably are highly engaged in online activism. If this is done, it can possibly reduce the occurrence of slacktivism. However, much of the onus is on the individual and activists should also motivate themselves to do better and reduce slacktivism by realizing what they are sharing. For example, within the BLM movement, there may be slacktivism through posting black squares. If combined with more informed graphics, it might bring more awareness to this relevant social issue.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- Social media can be useful, as it offers a way for sharing information, creative users, and activism for relevant global issues.
- Gen Zs are arguably highly present on social media and may be active SJWs.
- As a result of such large amounts of information being shared and viewed through social media, misinformation may be problematic.
- Although information is easily accessible, there is a risk for major security issues, such as those resulting from clickbait and surrounding conspiracy theories.

- Oftentimes, there is possibly no transfer of activism from the online world to the real world.

Question Period

- Public and personal safety is probably of most concern today.
- Gen Zs have the potential to reduce slacktivism through motivation to change their actions. The government may also have a key role in this, as they may have the ability to educate Gen Zs about measures to take to make real societal change.
- Slacktivism may exist in addressing social issues, such as racism, as slacktivism is arguably evident in the BLM movement.



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