

# How 'Clicktivism' Has Changed The Way We Protest Forever

By Rosie Frost, *Euronews*, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020

As someone just a year younger than the internet, its universal influence has directly shaped the way that I and others born into the online generation engage with social change. For some, it makes activism without the ability to connect using social media completely unimaginable.

Others are not so convinced by the digital revolution. Online activism is often called 'clicktivism', or worse 'slacktivism' because it is perceived as superficial or lazy. We're nostalgic for 60s style mass sit-ins, having seen lacklustre efforts from celebrities, with far more to give than a like or share. All it's done is created questions about whether this relatively new form of protest can really achieve anything.

Online spaces undeniably provide information to help groups organise behind a cause. Signing petitions for movements worldwide, using hashtags, having better access to evidence of injustice - it has all had an impact on how often we put our political opinions out there and the confidence we have in our ability to shift the status quo.

Luzie is a student wrote a paper on the subject. "I have been vocal about environmental causes and issues on my social media for about two years now," she says. For Luzie it "mostly takes the form of consuming educational content from scientific sources and activists, and sharing this information in my [Instagram] stories". She says that seeing posts online of people getting involved offline directly inspired her to do the same. "I also felt like I precisely did not want to be a 'slacktivist'," she explains. "I came to the conclusion that online activism is effective and necessary but only if it's paired with offline activism."

It doesn't always have to be through strikes or protests either. Although not as visible as taking to the streets to call for government action, Luzie reminds me that discussing these issues with the people we know is also a kind of activism.

It just shows how online activities can have off-line consequences for young people. The more they see causes spread on the internet, the more likely they are to contact officials, join campaign groups, and volunteer in the flesh.

Social media proved critical in mobilising people for the 2017 March for Science following Donald Trump's comments suggesting climate change was a hoax. The idea to create the march was born from a single Reddit conversation surrounding a decision to remove all references to climate change from the White House website.

Surveys of participants from this and similar marches in America found that up to 60 per cent had heard about them on Facebook and a further 10 per cent from Twitter. The ability to network online allowed people to learn about specific gatherings, discuss why they were happening, and find out how many people they knew were also interested in taking part.

It's a cycle of participation with social media at its core and these kinds of posts can have a big impact, inspiring more young people to become involved in fighting for their future.

Being open to all, online activism can create opportunities for people who may not traditionally be seen as leaders. Anyone can sign up for an account on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter and start sharing their thoughts about the climate crisis to an audience. Without the rigid structures of a traditional organisation, the internet allows completely new forms of activism to thrive, opening ever more avenues to stand up for what you believe in.