



Social Media for Social Action

This lesson will engage students in the debate about the efficacy of social media as a tool for social change. Social media is a valuable tool for social justice advocates. It allows organizers to reach broad audiences, network with other organizations and gain visibility for their cause.

This lesson will engage students in the debate about the efficacy of social media as a tool for social change. While some researchers and activists have written about the empowering effects of online social engagement, others critique the limits of what some people have coined armchair activism, clicktivism or slacktivism. Students will explore the effectiveness of viral hashtag campaigns representing themes related to identity, diversity, justice and action.

Using articles to craft arguments, students will discuss and evaluate the pros, cons, limits and possibilities of online activism.¹

Thinking of starting a Twitter account with your group?

A few important reminders before you get started:

- Review your school's policies on: (1) publicly sharing images of students; and (2) using social media within the school building. Secure administrative and parental permission for either activity if necessary.
- Assess your students' technology strengths. How many have Twitter accounts? Devices? Access to the Internet? Do your students know how to create image shares? Have access to design software? Consult with your school librarian or with colleagues in the art or computer science departments to fill in the gaps.
- Review adolescent- and teen-specific tips for being safe on social media at commonsensemedia.org/social-media

¹ Teaching Tolerance; Social Media for Social Action.
Teaching Tolerance; Tweeting for Change.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Explore reasons to **engage in digital activism**
- Understand that there are **different ways to engage in social activism online**
- **Analyze and evaluate pros and cons of digital activism**

Vocabulary

Activism a practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action, especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.

Slacktivism/clicktivism actions performed via the internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement.²

Social Media Activism activism around a social cause or world issue using technology. Technology can include anything from the internet to cell phones to social media sites and more.

² Sources: merriam-webster.com, Google Dictionary

The Pros of Social Media Activism

Social media provides a platform for individuals to communicate messages of solidarity and raise awareness of social justice issues. Live Twitter chats create a synchronous environment where *diverse groups of people in different geographic locations* can think and act collectively to increase awareness and effect change. The chat environment also offers the moderator potential opportunities to stand up for others or intervene to interrupt hateful or biased speech.

The Cons of Social Media Activism

While some researchers and activists have written about the empowering effects of online social engagement, others critique the limits of what some people have coined armchair activism, clicktivism or slacktivism.

#NODAPL

In the spring of 2016, grassroots movements to protest the construction of the North Dakota Access Pipeline began. The pipeline was projected to run from the Bakken oil fields in western North Dakota to southern Illinois, crossing beneath the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers, as well as under part of Lake Oahe near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Many in the Standing Rock tribe considered the pipeline and its intended crossing of the Missouri River to constitute a threat to the region's clean water and to ancient burial grounds.³⁴

The Dakota Access Pipeline protests, now commonly referred to as #NODAPL, is a Twitter hashtag and social media campaign for the struggle against the proposed and partially built Dakota Access Pipeline. The movement was largely started by Indigenous youth, who used social media campaigns to create awareness for the cause. A young indigenous girl named Tokata Iron Eyes and her teenage friends are credited with starting the #NoDAPL



Young people hold signs in Navajo, Lakota/Dakota and English before marching to a sacred burial site disturbed by bulldozers building the Dakota Access Pipeline on Sept. 4, 2016, near Cannon Ball, North Dakota.

Image: ROBYN BECK/AFP/Getty Images

movement. As part of the Standing Rock Youth, a group of about 30 young people from the Standing Rock Sioux community, they decided to go online and make the issue of the Dakota Access Pipeline Construction known. Protests against the pipeline project captured the attention of Social Media users across the globe under the slogan #NoDAPL aka "No Dakota Access Pipeline".

The #NoDAPL movement utilized various social media platforms, such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, to gain awareness of the issue occurring at Standing Rock. The people's petition spread across social

³ Wikipedia: "Dakota Access Pipeline Protests".

⁴ Mashable.com, Matt Petronzio, "How young Native Americans used social media to build up the #NoDAPL Movement".

media and gained an immense support in a short amount of time.⁵

⁵ Wikipedia: NODAPL

Essential Questions

- How can people use technology and social media as tools for social activism?
- What are possible benefits of online social activism?
- What are its possible limitations or negative effects?
- What social issues do you feel passionately about and would you want to engage in online and/or offline? Why?
- What practical, ethical or social issues would be important to consider in social media activism? Why?