THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND RESULTANT 'SLACKTIVISM' IN INTERNATIONAL NON-GOV ORGANISATION CAMPAIGNS

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The social media is an example of a new media that evolved from the making and wider reach of the internet. Branston and Stafford (2010, pp. 139, 245) described the internet-powered 'globalised media' and its transitory or evolving nature leading to classification of users or debaters on the social media as pessimists or optimists.

The social media has been used initially to connect students on campuses and has grown to be an important media for sourcing news, socializing anytime and anywhere on any digital device; both mobile and fixed such as smartphone or LCD television. Kerry (2017) described how the Facebook was formed in 2004 and quickly grew to become a global giant; reaching out to engage in all forms of communication.

Angela (2016) outlined the various stages that led to the evolution of the social media and Facebook in particular. The introduction of Apple Macintosh computers; as well as the 'mainstreaming' of the use of the personal computers to type or word-process by individuals and organisations; leading to the speedy adoption of the internet which gives users access to a wealth of information.

But, the questions remains that when it comes to activism and charity fundraising, "is the social media itself going to be able to stimulate, make the desired change and deliver the result or set-target "? "Is the physical or human activity in the 'open arena' or 'public place' not the real driver of change as opposed to 'merely' online posting and protest in the form of 'individual comments' and 'likes' as is common on the SNSs? Are we not in an era of Slacktivism, where we merely tackle issues online and never really strived to 'get things done' in an 'active' way in order to achieve a specific result or target?

Slacktivism can be a real problem when online activities are not matched with the desired physical component; especially when it comes to awareness and fundraising. Rotman etal, (2011) described 'slacktivism' as a low-risk, low cost activity via the social media, whose

purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity. Practical activism was described as the use of a direct, proactive and often confrontational action towards attaining a societal change.

Practical activism may also be seen in the wider context of having the ability to gauge the feeling of the public accurately in a timely manner as opposed to just dumping or posting 'stuffs' online and on other digital media and expecting results. The wider macro-economic environment is of great importance when it comes to a successful charity campaign. For example, in 2010 at the height of the financial crisis that lingered from 2007/08 which caused the global recession, the Royal Hospital for Sick Children in Scotland embarked on the New Pyjamas Campaign to raise £15m for a new hospital at Little France (BBC, 2010 accessed 19.10.2017).

While the online campaign went on quite well, the timing of the campaign in the wider economic and physical environment is wrong, as potential institutional investors and private citizens were full of worries about the wider economic climate at the time. It is therefore no surprise that as little as £60,000.oo was only realised after spending about £500,000.oo on the project (Jones, 2010 accessed 19.10.2017). The campaign was not a successful one and the lesson to be learnt is that the general social and economic atmosphere in the public is very importance when a charity or fundraising is to be embarked upon; as opposed to simply relying on the ability of the media to do the job.

A common theme of the computer mediated technology especially the Social Networking Sites   (SNSs) is sharing - an attribute that makes it similar to public speaking. Boltanski (1999, 20) quoted Habermas (1989) that talk (public speech) is a significant form of engagement, a form of action in its own right (Madianou, 2012). 'Public speaking' to an audience is a form of 'sharing'. That is, from the speaker (Producer) to the listeners (Consumers). In fact, the social media has enabled the public speaker to reach a wider and more diverse global audience than what the traditional media allowed.

Karina Brisby in Magee and Mitchell (2015, pp. 5) opined that the stage is set for NGOs to fully incorporate the social media into their organisational structure and strategy, pointing out that "sharing is part of a digital culture unlike the traditional media where information tend to be restricted". In an era where Citizen Journalists break the news before the mainstream media can catch up with events (making them to even appeal for postings via the social

media), the resultant growth of the SNSs in social discourse has huge implications on the way information, programme and event is managed globally and especially by the NGOs.

Chouliaraki, (2006, 2008) in Madianou, (2012, pp. 251-252) described two broad ethical norms that have traditionally informed the representation of distant suffering and humanitarian communication as cosmopolitan and communitarianism. The SNSs have been able to manifest in these two broad senses as large communities and smaller niche communities are capable of being formed for different reasons by people and organisations from all walks of life all over the world.

The dynamics of social media in advocacy is in its wider appeal and flexibility of usage across the board. Individuals and organisations now have access to SNSs and can use it as a tool for non-profit advocacy. Boyd (2010,46) in Madianou (2010, pp. 254-255) noted that the flexibility of the SNSs; which makes the contents to be capable of being stored, reproduced, copied, transferred and disseminated makes it a uniquely different form when compared to the traditional media. Specific or (niche) audience can be reached in a way that the traditional media was never capable of doing.

Such was the online charity effort embarked upon by Katie Cutler in January, 2015 on GoFundMe charity page for Alan Barnes who was mugged and through which £300,000.oo was raised well above the £500.oo target originally intended. (BBC, 2015 accessed 17.10.2017). This not only turned out to be a successful fundraising exercise, it also triggered simultaneously debates about the plight of the vulnerable disabled people in the UK.

The ability of the social media to disintermediate and coagulate a meagre effort or input and turn such into a huge undertaking or output is equally manifest in the case of Malala Yousafzai, a Pakistani girl who started out as an unknown child blogger and ended up being the youngest Nobel Peace Prize winner and world-renown women's activist (www.nobelprice.org accessed 15.10.2017). She was named by the United Nations Secretary General António Guterres as the Messenger of Peace; the highest honour given to a citizen by the UN in recognition of a charitable deeds in recognition of her efforts in promoting girls' education (UN, 2017 accessed 14.10.2017).

However, a critical look into the life of Malala Yousafzai shows that there were series of physical engagements that led to these achievements apart from mere blogging. As a result of

an incident reportedly linked to the Taliban who tried to murder her due to her increasing visibility and voice in the conservative Pakistani public. She was taken to England for treatment and adopted for her safety (Biography.com, 2017 accessed 17.10.2017). This generated widespread condemnation from the mainstream press; triggering a massive international condemnation. The end result being the fame and success that Malala enjoys today. So, one can easily deduce that a combination of online (virtual) activism and physical (public) activism has greater potential of making a charity or awareness campaign successful.

Lovejoy and Saxton (2012, pp. 338) buttressed the fact that the new media has not replaced the old media entirely, noting that the spread of the new media has actually enhanced the depth at which the NGOs communicate with their clients; as well as build new relationships in such a way to uphold good accounting and public trust in their operations. Through media convergence, there is increased capability to engage in niche communication between peer groups or people of 'same' interest as well as intermediate activities between the different media such as online newspaper, radio, television, blogs, SNSs, video, mobile telephony (Hartley, 2011, pp. 188-189). The advent of social media has thus enabled NGOs to gain deeper penetration of audience, as well as obtain feedback seamlessly and in real-time from their clients and donors in a way never seemed possible some years back (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012, pp. 338).

Finally, the potentials of new media in INGO campaigns are yet to be fully realised, as the new media technology and its capabilities continues to evolve. However; one thing is sure, there is yet no single model that is perfect or that is exclusive in the sense that modern media; especially the social media in its digital form is increasingly interwoven and in transit. No one can predict or pin-point the final shape or form it will take.

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APPENDIX

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

NGO Non-Governmental Organisations

INGO International Non-Governmental Organisations

SNS Social Networking Site