

Case Study

Chapter 16

A Canadian post-secondary student watches a video about human rights violations in another part of the world, takes action online, and donates money. The student is busy with school and work but wants to take time to be aware of difference social issues and take action when and how she/he is able to do so. The student often discusses these issues with friends and family, both in person and online.

Some friends aren't interested in these issues while other friends take a more active role, organizing and participating in protests, and joining groups with other activists to raise funds and coordinate events for awareness.

1. **How might the student's activism be described? Why are some critical of this type of activism? Is the criticism justified?**
2. **Do you think some of the forms of activism described in the case study are more effective than others? Why or why not?**
3. **How does information technology play a role in activism?**
4. **Discuss various sociological frameworks and how they explain the role of social movements.**
5. **What is the importance of resource acquisition? What are some resources necessary to social movements?**

Sample Answers:

1. The student's activism may be dismissed by some as "slacktivism" or "clicktivism" (Schomerus, Allen, & Viassenroot, 2012), as discussed in the text. The criticism is that this type of activism demonstrates a lack of effort and genuine engagement with the issue, since clicking a "like" or signing an online petition takes so little effort. Others will argue that this criticism is not justified because any action can be valuable. In the case of a petition, enough signatures may result in social change. Donations can also help groups achieve social change. In our busy lives, it is difficult and perhaps idealistic to expect more. Perhaps, though, there should be encouragement for more engagement, such as volunteering.
2. Protests may be more effective in the sense that they garner media attention and give a face to the issue versus online petitions. People may be more likely to pay attention and believe the protesters since they've made the time and effort to protest against action with which they disagree, thus advocating for social change. These groups may lead to social movements that have more influence and resources than individuals. More direct forms of activism can result in increased solidarity and empowerment. The student's friends who are engaged in more direct activism may influence her/him to join them.
3. The internet, social media, and mobile phones have impacted activism in that these tools allow activists to communicate with each other and organize events. One example from the text is how "Arab Spring is often termed a digital or Twitter revolution because of the heavy reliance that organizers had on social media to provide information and mobilize citizens to join the protest." On the other hand, digital activism has been criticized for being simplistic and not achieving social change due to "sound bites" rather than a full understanding of complex social issues. We also see the rise of hacktivism, which as defined in the text "consists of hacking a computer network to obtain information or impede the regular functioning of ICTs for a socially or politically motivated purpose." We see that ICTs can be used in many ways related to activism.

4. Conflict theory posits that social movements result due to power imbalances in society and the desire to create a more egalitarian society. Feminist social movements focus on the rights of women who have faced discrimination and limited access to full social and political participation due to their gender. Network theory explores how social networks, interactions, and interpersonal relationships contribute to social movements. According to the text, a more recent phenomenon is New Social Movements (NSM) that are “concerned with creating awareness around the domination of capitalist, post-industrial forces and aim to regain control over the subjectivity of the lifeworld.”

5. In sociology, it is important to look at how social movements “acquire, manage, and mobilize resources,” as outlined in the text. Without resources, these movements cannot function. These resources can be tangible (money, space) and intangible (participation and organization). In the twenty-first century, technology acquisition has become an important resource for social movements and mobilization.